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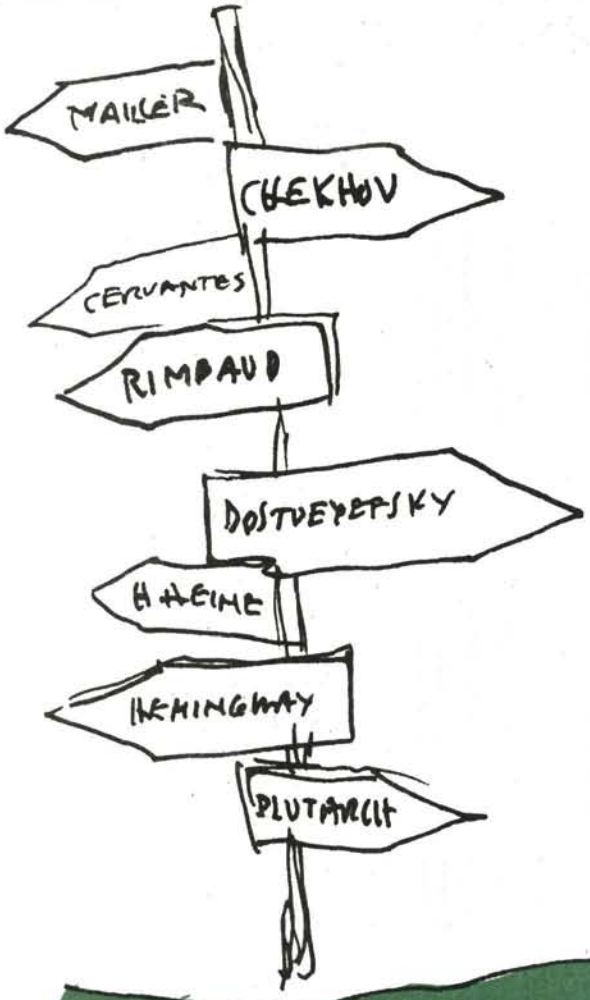

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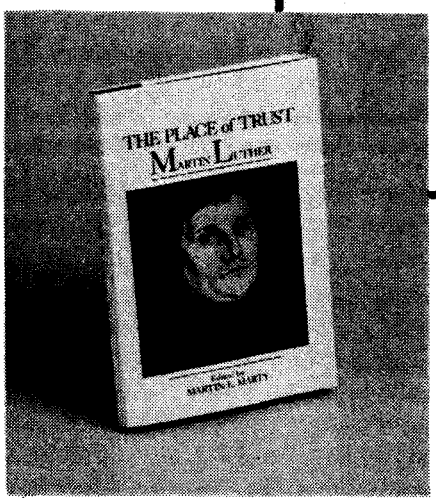

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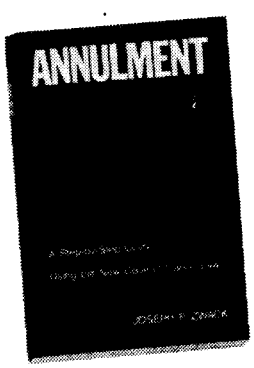

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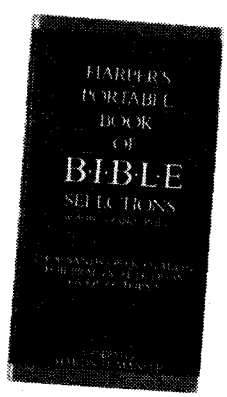

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Correspondence

A vote for motherhood

Halifax, Nova Scotia

To the Editors: Hurrah for Janet Scott Barlow! She has expressed [Sept. 23] eloquently, elegantly, and humorously, the thoughts and feelings of many of us "Mums" who cheerfully (mostly) stayed in the kitchen at home because we were sure that bringing up children was worthwhile. Surprise! It still is.

So thanks, Janet, and thanks, *Commonweal*.

MARGARET BOYD

Beginning at home

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

To the Editors: In his review of Edward S. Herman's *The Real Terror Network* [May 6], Professor Evans comes up short in one key area. He insists that if you start arguing human rights abuses are worse in U.S. client regimes than under the Communist-bloc nations, you inevitably fall into a "body count mentality" which destroys the concept as a serious moral issue. His quote then from Simone Weil infers that we should raise our voices wherever violations are taking place.

Nonsense. No one could possibly be expected to do this. The proper starting place for a person with a genuine and honest concern about human rights is at home where their efforts will likely have the most effect, bringing public pressure to bear on the policies of their own government which are the cause of people suffering elsewhere.

Another important issue is raised. For instance, we would not think very much of the integrity or the courage of a Soviet intellectual who criticizes U.S. involvement in Central America. We would dismiss him as a mere propagandist. Similarly, how can Americans become outraged over martial law in Poland while their own government is a sponsor of systematic violence in the third world, a fact which even he admits?

For Professor Evans himself, assuming if he does indeed have a serious concern about human rights, the choice is a simple one. Should he, in his capacity as assistant-professor at The Catholic University of America, be making as many people aware about what the United States government is doing in the third world so that in the event any of his students become future leaders, they will be in the position to bring about changes? If he believes that the suffering of people in Poland can be in any way lessened by arousing public opinion in the United States, then well and good. Otherwise it is an exercise in political rhetoric, which is the worst kind of debasement of all.

RON MacGILLIVRAY

Commonweal welcomes letters on subjects treated in its pages. Letters of not more than 250 or 300 words naturally have a better chance of being published.

The author replies:

In reply to the various questions raised by Mr. MacGillivray, both those stated directly and those stated indirectly, I would like to make the following points:

1) On the general issue of U.S. foreign policy and human rights, I have written a number of articles and given many interviews and talks in which I attacked the argument of the neo-Cold Warriors that in American foreign policy human rights concerns had to be abandoned because of the need to combat international terrorism. I have maintained that such a policy was contrary to the moral principles on which American society is based and that in the long run it would serve to promote rather than control terrorism.

2) On the specific issue of U.S. policy in Central America, I have also written a number of articles and given many talks and interviews. In these articles, talks, and interviews I have criticized current U.S. policy in that region not only for political and strategic reasons but also because I feel that the U.S. is quite wrong to be ignoring or downplaying the major human rights violations of several of the countries of the region.

3) In my courses at Catholic University I have my students read a variety of materials on human rights. For example, I assign papal encyclicals and statements of Bishops' Conferences on social justice issues, analyses and critiques of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America, and books and articles on the Soviet repression of its political and religious dissidents. My experiences with my students and with all of the other people that I have dealt with concerning the human rights issue convinces me that the only way to give people any long-term commitment to the cause of human rights is to *not* identify this cause exclusively with any one ideology, cause, or country.

4) Also quite destructive of the human rights cause are arguments about "effectiveness" when such arguments fit much too conveniently into rigid ideological views of world politics. For example, the argument about the contrast in American leverage over its client states compared to its leverage over the Soviet Union and its client states is accepted by many of the neo-Cold Warriors. But they draw a different conclusion from this fact. They argue that the U.S. should use quiet diplomacy on human rights violations by its own allies while issuing sharp public condemnations of human rights violations by the Soviet bloc. Such quiet diplomacy will not weaken the political stability of America's allies; while denunciations of the Soviet bloc's human rights violations will weaken the Soviet Union campaign of subversion that is supposedly causing the human rights violations of America's allies. The transparency of the "effectiveness" argument is thus revealed: Quite conveniently, both ends of the ideological spectrum can happily continue to attack their favorite targets.

ERNEST EVANS

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LET THE RACE BEGIN

BY AUTHORIZING a reelection committee, President Reagan has at least tentatively committed himself to run again. The time has therefore come to look at the chicken entrails. One finding, from the annual convention of the American Political Science Association: the American public is less "independent" and less automatically swayed by economic conditions than is generally thought. Two much discussed papers at the convention challenged the idea that voters are shedding their party ties and responding instead to their pocketbooks. In 1982, for example, the Republicans lost many fewer House seats than mathematical models, based on the president's lower popularity rating and the condition of the economy, predicted. Given the economic recession and Mr. Reagan's slump in popularity at that time to 42 percent approval, one such widely cited model predicted that the GOP would lose 58 House seats. In fact the Republicans lost only 26, less than half that figure. Part of the reason: in that election the GOP demonstrated superior organizational ability in the way the party handled its money. At the last minute the Republicans funneled $2.5 million in late contributions to particularly embattled incumbents; the Democrats spread more than $6 million to 32 incumbents who ended their campaigns with more than $100,000 each in the bank. The conclusion: by acting as a disciplined party, the Republicans were able to minimize potential gains that the Democrats had hoped to achieve through reliance on the superior skills of their individual candidates.

As for the reported growth in influence by political independents, considerable skepticism was expressed by some political scientists. Over the last two decades, self-identified independents have in most polls grown to the point that they surpass the Republicans and come close to matching the number of Democrats. But as the political scientists pointed out, most independents admit they "lean" to one party or another and usually vote that way. Thus in a recent *Washington Post*-ABC survey, 35 percent of self-professed independents said they leaned to the Republicans, 39 percent to the Democrats, and 25 percent said they had no lean at all. This means that the "pure independents" amount to only 9 percent of the electorate, as compared with 35 percent who call themselves independent. Obviously the so-called independent vote is a lot less important than is generally thought, and parties more important. This might give the better organized and better financed Republicans a leg up.

But this is not the whole story by any means. Psyching out the future is never simple. The polls indicate a 45 percent preference for the Democrats and only a 24 percent preference for the Republicans. However, that disparity did not keep Mr. Reagan from winning strongly last time. All reports indicate that the president's personal popularity stays high; he might well repeat last time's winning performance. On the other hand, the Republicans cracked the solid South last time; this time

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indications are that GOP standing has fallen sharply in the South. The Democrats gained one Southern governor's mansion in 1981 and two more last year; the trend seems to be running in the direction of a return to a solid Democratic South. This would be particularly true if the Democrats have a Southerner on the ticket in either first or second place.

Nor is that all. A survey by pollster Louis Harris indicates that what were called the first signs of a "massive Democratic party sweep in 1984" are taking shape "just below the surface in American politics." If borne out in the voting booth, the result could endanger President Reagan's reelection chances, despite his own popularity, as well as Republican control of the Senate. "Even at this early date," Harris said, "it would seem that the GOP will be lucky if it can avoid a disaster in 1984." Some of the Harris findings:

- In 33 states that will elect U.S. senators next year, Democrats hold a popular vote lead of 51 to 39 percent. Republicans hold seats in 19 of these 33 states. If the Democrats retain their present advantage, it is "virtually certain" that the GOP would lose control of the Senate.
- Democrats hold a 53-to-37 percent margin in House races. This trend could very well raise the Democratic majority in the House to well over 150 seats.

Polls, especially those taken a year in advance, are always tentative. Despite Mr. Harris's figures, the Republicans easily surpass the Democrats in organization techniques, and they have effectively mastered the new computer wizardry. John Anderson may run and thus take votes away from the Democrats. The population shift to the more conservative states of the Sun Belt helps the GOP. Inflation is way down, even if unemployment is not, and Mr. Reagan and the Republicans will be able to claim the credit, huge deficit or no. The administration cannot point to any foreign policy triumphs, but Mr. Reagan will be able to run against Yuri Andropov on a hard anti-Soviet line. As surely as night follows day, Republican orators will have a field day labeling the Democrats as irresponsible big-spenders who would bring raging inflation back. Above all, Mr. Reagan's popularity is the GOP's not-so-secret weapon, and he is a great campaigner. So what does all this add up to? In commenting on his survey, pollster Harris said: "Certainly, the hopes of the Republican party that the Reagan 1980 election was a forerunner of a major change in the electorate for conservative Republicans akin to the New Deal revolution of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 have now been shattered." Maybe so, but we are making no predictions. The way it looks now, the 1984 race s likely to be close.

IN THE MAIL

Each day at *Commonweal* a manila folder thick with paper circulates from editor's desk to editor's desk. The top layer of this material, like the frosting on a cake, consists of letters to the editors, requests for permission to reprint articles, replies from writers, and handwritten notes without margins linking, say, Sister Mansour to the Zionist conspiracy. Beyond that are press releases, the newsletters, the printed messages beginning "Dear Friend," "Dear Reader," and "Dear Concerned American." Day by day, these constitute a kind of census of all the organized worry, anger, compassion, ambition, idealism, religious feeling, civic spirit, and sheer nuttiness that occupies the Republic.

On one day in mid-September, for instance, the Union of Concerned Scientists alerted us (in eight single-spaced pages) to the "critical period in arms control." The Center for Defense Information attacks cruise missiles in its newsletter and is also pushing its new film with Paul Newman. New Jersey SANE needs $30,000 to replace its run-down equipment with a new micro-computer. The War Resisters League *News* reports on the European anti-nuclear movement as well as Central America—"at the turning point."

Central America is also the subject of "An Urgent Message From Ramsey Clark" (The Disarm Education Fund). The U.S. Committee in Solidarity With the People of El Salvador needs $20,000 in the next two weeks. A press release from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith welcomes the Nicaraguan government's intention to return that nation's only synagogue to its congregation. The League of Woman Voters wants its "confidential" National Security Survey completed and returned within twelve days. We wonder if they'll be hearing from Maj. Gen. John Singlaub (Ret) who urges us (five pages single-spaced but with very short paragraphs) to sign a "national petition of support for President Reagan's MX Missile program" and send money to the Council for Inter-American Security lest "Ted Kennedy and Tip O'Neil [sic] bring President Reagan and America to it's [sic] knees." Not just the survival of America but "the survival of your family and our Judeo-Christian ethic of morality" is of concern to David A. Williams of the American Family Association. "Hard-core liberals," warns Mr. Williams (four single-spaced pages but paragraphs as short as Maj. Gen. Singlaub's), are about to pass a "Gay Bill of Rights"—"in short, the gay community, with all its money and all its liberal influence, wants to change your lifestyle." Curiously, People for the American Way reports that the number-one worry of its members is "attempts by the 'pro-family' movement to pass laws mandating one acceptable lifestyle."

Compared to the political world, the religious front was relatively calm. *Catholic Trends* takes note of developments ranging from "parent education" programs to the establishment of an "Anglican-identity personal parish" for twenty Episcopalian families converting to Roman Catholicism. The National Committee for the Year of the Bible reports "Bible Activities Touching Millions Across America." The Lutheran Church of America (LCA) announces a feasibility study of a major joint fund appeal with the American Church (ALC) and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC). Dignity, the organization serving gay and lesbian Catholics, heralds its September convention.

Focusing on other parts of the world: A folder from the American Near East Refugees Aid outlines its work for the Palestinians. The American Friends Service Committee is sending 30,000 pounds of clothing to refugees from the

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drought in Ethiopia. Meals for Millions/Freedom from Hunger Foundation sends an annual report. So does Project Hope News, from the People-to-People Health Foundation. From Nestle we receive the Fourth Quarterly Report—120 pages worth!—of the Nestle Infant Formula Audit Commission chaired by Edmund S. Muskie. From the Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program comes *Refugees and Human Rights Newsletter*, this issue focusing on Central Americans seeking asylum in the U.S.

The bulletin of the Lithuanian National Foundation chronicles Lithuanian and Baltic resistance to Russian Communist rule. Amnesty International invites us to a reception and exhibit (with Elie Wiesel and Mayor Koch) of photographs recording the Cambodian holocaust. The "'yellow rain' holocaust" is the subject of a letter from the American Council for Free Asia: it describes a Soviet helicopter spraying a sticky substance on a little girl—"Every blood vessel in her body bursts . . . an innocent little girl is reduced to a bloody mass."

Not yellow rain but acid rain is one of the topics in a letter (four pages, single-spaced, very long paragraphs) from Friends of the Earth. Environmental Action takes only three pages, single-spaced, medium paragraphs, to urge that we "Stop the Subsidies" to nuclear power. Handgun Control, Inc. wants us to stop the "pistol lobby."

We haven't listed the business deals we were offered, the invitations (alas, not expenses paid) to conferences in Bermuda and Bible tours in the Middle East. But you get the idea of a full-day's harvest. Even so, we missed some of our most faithful correspondents: the American Jewish Committee, for example, or Kurt Vonnegut writing on behalf of the ACLU ("help me fight these book-burners"—one photo of a book burning enclosed). Pax Christi, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Ground Zero, The Riverside Church Disarmament Project—none of them was represented in that day's mailbag. Nor Jerry Fallwell fighting the freeze or homosexuality (short paragraphs and heavy underlining in color). There were none of the endless fundraising letters signed by Senators—Kennedy, Mondale, Helms, and Denton—that seem to threaten us to empty our wallets or be bored to death. Nor anything from Zero Population Growth, the NAACP Special Contribution Fund, or the Cato Institute, or the Catholic Press Association, or Bread for the World.

We missed, too, many of our regular newsletters: *F.A.S. Public Interest Report* (Federation of American Scientists); Indochina Issues (Indochina Project, Center for International Policy); *Health Horizons* (Franciscan Sisters of the Poor/Health Care Movement); *Saudi Report* (self-explanatory); *Arms Control Today* (Arms Control Association); *Washington Report on the Hemisphere* (Council on Hemispheric Affairs); *Matchbox* (Amnesty International); *Latinamerica press* (Noticias Aliadas); *Conscience* (Catholics for a Free Choice); *Lifeletter* (Ad Hoc Committee in Defense of Life); *American Family* (National Center for Family Studies); *Origins* (NC News Documentary Service).

And that's only half of it.

If reading this catalogue has been exhausting, reading the actual mail is even more so. Not because of the time involved—we confess, there's a lot of skimming. No, what makes paging through this pile of material so overwhelming is the yank and shove of the conflicting emotions that are stirred. Horror—at the afflictions, to which these letters are so often responses. Frustration—at the duplication of efforts and organizational conceits. Irritation—at the exaggerations and half-truths that pockmark the political promotions. Wonder—at the sheer variety of concerns. Admiration—at the irrepressible American energy for forming a group to deal with a problem. Paralysis—at the sight of so many competing demands for attention, dedication, resources. There is something of Hopkins's pied beauty in this wild array of announcements and appeals; something of Whitman's barbaric yawp and all-inclusive sympathy. But mostly there is a universe of human suffering and human hope—on the one hand, victims of drought and war and governmental folly; on the other hand,

Of several minds: *John Garvey*

THAT OLD CIVIL RELIGION

TO CRÈCHE OR NOT TO CRÈCHE

THE ISSUE of church and state is before the Supreme Court again. The question is whether a crèche can be installed at taxpayers' expense. The people who are in favor of putting up the crèche argue that in the particular instance involved the public installation and display of the crèche is a matter of local tradition more than religion. The display has been going on for years, with no objection (at least not a legally interesting one). A related argument is that Christmas is more a secular than religious occasion; it has passed into the culture in such a way that it can't be considered simply a religious holiday. They point to the lack of legal objection to such occasionally tax-supported Christmas symbols as Santa Claus, reindeer, etc.

It is a welcome relief, this instance of church-state conflict, because without involving the moral passions which we bring to such issues as bombs or abortion it can allow us to view the relationship between church and state somewhat more calmly than we can where issues of life and death are concerned.

Religious people should be very hesitant before they endorse the notion that governments paid for by people from a variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds ought to put up Christmas decorations because Christmas is now as secular a season as it is religious. This may have its share of truth, but we ought to mourn it. I don't like the idea that

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religion at any level should be supported by taxpayers against their will (which is the only way taxpayers really support anything). I find the argument that public prayer ought to be allowed in public schools because we allow congressional chaplains a stupid one. Let's get rid of the chaplains. A congressman of my acquaintance, asked if anyone objected to prayers in Congress said, "No, not at all. Nobody pays any attention."

Which is precisely the point. If religion is to be taken seriously, it should not become the equivalent of the piety of ancient Rome—that is, it should not be a matter of automatic obeisance run through before you get down to the real business at hand. But this is one of the two ways civic religion has to go: it becomes a matter of ritual irrelevance, or a prop for the state's agenda—in either case, a less-than-central matter. It is like the sprig of parsley nobody eats, though it is supposed to be good for you, laid next to the bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich in diners which are putting on airs. There are preachers, priests, and rabbis who don't mind this, and lend themselves to Congress and state governments for pious purposes; better to be a spear-carrier than never to see the opera at all. But do they really reflect on what they are doing when they accept this?

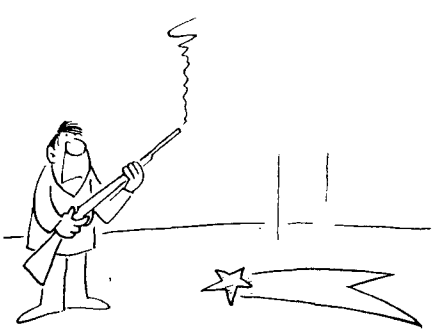
The argument against any involvement of church and state has made for some odd alliances, with people who are genuine foaming-at-the-mouth anti-religionists in agreement with Southern Baptists, though for very different reasons. The anti-religion folk want to see the influence of religion on the body politic eliminated. Their reasons are not without foundation: they remember the Inquisition, the Crusades, Cromwell's massacres, missionary colonialism, etc. They know that the result of alliances between religion and political power has not been good. (They tend to be somewhat less sensitive about more recent, entirely secular, slaughters.)

I don't like to see the state allied with Christianity, not because it will be bad for the state, but because it will be bad for Christianity. Senate chaplains, prayer in public schools, and tax-supported crèches are the last attenuated remnants of the two-swords theory, the notion that there should be a more or less clear division of power between spiritual and temporal authorities. It was a convenient notion from the time of Constantine to the time of the Enlightenment. I don't think it was very good for the Gospel.

The belief that religion is part of life (so that one can speak of one's religious life as something distinct from one's political life, work life, and sex life) is common, and as unbiblical as it could be. One common understanding has it that religion is the compartment of life which has to do with personal ethics, worship—seen as a formal and periodic pious observance, presided over by a professional whose job it is to do such things—and those ceremonies and emotions which attend critical moments like matrimonial commitments, births, and deaths. There is a widespread assumption that some kind of religion—almost any kind—has a good effect on society as a whole, and the Ad Council frequently presents us with that rather cloudy but heartfelt message.

Now, there is some truth to this. It is true that a common form of reverence, or even something so thin as a common recognition that reverence is a good idea, wherever it may be found, has been an important social agreement; it is part of what bound us together. A vague sense that some things are sacred and that it is good to acknowledge the fact is better than no sense of the sacred at all.

But important as this perception is, it isn't really very different from the pagan religion of the Roman Empire, which agreed with us that gods make good social glue. One of the things which the Empire had against the Jews was the Jewish insistence that their God didn't work that way. Reading Samuel we learn that even having a king—which is to say, a government of the ordinary kind—was a compromise Israel's God was not happy with. The people wanted a king so that they could "be like other people": like idol-worshippers, in other words. And an idol, among other things, is a god that has a use.



The Romans couldn't understand any god that couldn't be used. Gods existed to hallow particular events of Roman life. They were part of the celebration of common and good things. By Rome's very reasonable standards, the Jewish objection to seeing their God included in the Roman pantheon was at best elitist and at worst rebellious. When Christianity came along it inherited this unreasonableness and maintained it, in varying degrees, until Constantine made Christianity the imperial religion. It can be argued that at this point Christianity commonly began to perform the same function for Christendom that pagan piety had performed for the ancient Empire.

Christianity is at its root about a radical and thoroughly transforming obedience to God. This is not even close to the civic religion of presidential prayer breakfasts, congressional chaplains, or publicly-funded crèches. A Christianity which allows itself to be used, even to do something so cheery as to promote a free-floating, non-religious "Christmas spirit," accepts the pagan role assigned to it by secular society. It is a paradox that we are more truly secular and Godless when we accept the state's patronage. That patronage is a hallowed tradition, and it is still maintained in countries where churches are subsidized by the government, but ancient though it may be it's a shame that it was ever common. Apart from the offense it causes non-Christians, a tax-supported crèche is in its way a reminder of the fact that Christianity has been a kept religion, Caesar's pet, and remains now as a sentiment. One woman I know suggested that if we need a holiday we can celebrate in common without having a common religion, we ought to reinstitute Saturnalia. I like the idea, which is very much in the finest pagan tradition of civic religion.

JOHN GARVEY

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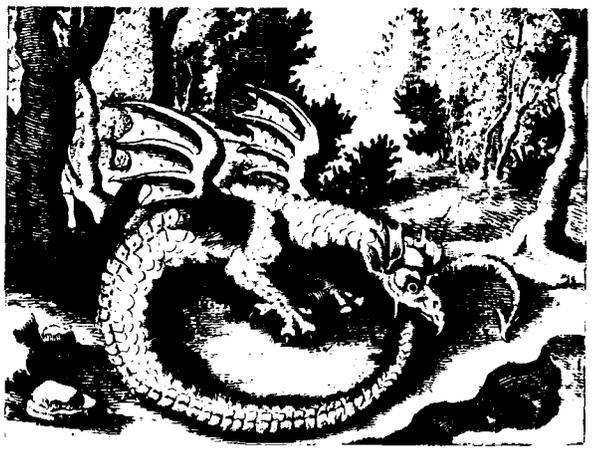
JAMES MERRILL'S UNIQUE SEARCH FOR NEW MYTHS



Paradise or disintegration

MICHAEL HARRINGTON

IT IS POSSIBLE that James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover* (Atheneum, $25, $12.95 paper, 560 pp.) is one of the significant works of the second half of this century.

It would, of course, be foolish to try to be more precise. It is simply too early even to hazard the semblance of a definitive judgment. Time must participate in a decision which can only be made looking backward at a distance; the book, like the shades of the dead whom Merrill summons back to life, must be seen in a rear-view mirror. But to say that the future might well regard *The Changing Light* as major is to make a very large present claim for a powerful and unique poem.

Before supporting that claim, however, I should admit to at least three reasons why I might be overly enthusiastic. First, Merrill is culturally (and chronologically) of my generation. His points of reference—Blake, Eliot, Auden, Stevens—are my own and there is even a passing reference to the Village bar in which I gloriously misspent most of my twenties and early thirties. Secondly, I read, and re-read, *The Changing Light* during a five-month stay in Europe, i.e., in a time when I was deprived of the boring reassurance of everyday life and perhaps became hypersensitive as a result. Not so incidentally, I visited two cities—Athens and Venice—which figure in the poem and even went sightseeing with its images in my mind. And thirdly, I came upon the book shortly after finishing my own analysis of what is one of Merrill's central themes, the effective decline of religious belief in Western society. The poem therefore had—has—a relevance for me which could be personal and exceptional.

Even so, I am convinced that *The Changing Light at Sandover* is an event of importance in our culture and not just in my own life. Why?

The book is "about" a series of revelations from heaven and the dead, communicated to a ouija board whose "Hand" is "DJ" and whose interpreter is "JM" (David Jackson and James Merrill, but both are characters in a fiction and I will call them DJ and JM when they appear in that guise). The setting is the religious social crisis of the contemporary world which, with its menaces of atomic and population explosions, must face the question of whether reality is ultimately benign or whether it is tending back toward the chaos from which it emerged. These issues are posed in terms of new myths—the old faiths, Merrill thinks, are unbelievable. Will God B (for biology) and Mother Nature triumph over anti-matter and disintegration? Will the spiritual forces accumulated over the generations produce "a great glory or a great puddle"?

More simply put: modern men and women have lost that basic, essentially religious, trust in the ultimate goodness of existence at the very moment at which they themselves have acquired the power to destroy, if not the cosmos, then a good part of our small corner of it. Two previous worlds, we are told, did self-destruct, either through a nuclear blast or by a Malthusian conflict between a race of centaurs and their bat-like helpers. Ours is the third and last world.

My summary and prose brutalization of the poem should not be taken to suggest that it is a compound of cobwebs and Weltschmerz. On the contrary, *The Changing Light* is intricately architectonic and intellectually serious. Like *Finnegans Wake* it comes full circle: it concludes as JM begins reading all that has gone before to a heavenly audience and intones its first word as its last word. This preposterous notion, and many others, is so totally and convincingly imagined that, when JM and DJ finally break off contact with three of the dead, there is a poignant sense of present loss. Indeed, if all of its parts failed, which is in no way the case, *The Changing Light* would still be a triumph as an incredibly realized whole.

The poem is divided into three main sections and a brief coda. The first book, *Ephraim*, consists of twenty-six separate poems beginning with the successive letters of the alphabet. It establishes the basic dramatic premise about the ouija board and introduces some of the central themes: the decline of the old myths, presented in a lovely elegy telling how "Venice, her least stone/Pure menace at the start, at length became/A

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window fiery-mild, whose walked-through frame/Everything else, at sunset, hinged upon—''; a debate between JM and his artist nephew over realism (science, facts, this world) and faith-art (the otherworldly); the fearfulness of power as JM learns that the bomb at Hiroshima destroyed souls as well as bodies; and, with an allusion to Wallace Stevens, the idea of God as that which (who) conserves an unstable universe whose black holes are scientific intuitions of an unthinkable and metaphysical possibility.

Ephraim also contains a poetic fragment of a lost novel which is confusing and wisely forgotten, and many more personal references than the rest of *The Changing Light*, references which are sometimes excessive and obscure. The whole project, one suspects, did not become clear to Merrill until he began to work on the next book, *Mirabel*; and thus *Ephraim* is marred by some loose threads. It is in *Mirabel* (twice as long as *Ephraim*, followed by *Scripts for the Pageant*, which is even longer) that the dramatic fascination of a marvelously articulated fictional (symbolic of the real) world becomes quite dominant.

''Mirabel'' is a bat-like creature, the survivor of one of those self-destructed worlds, who becomes a peacock as he talks to JM and DJ. Indeed he turns a scientific account of the genesis of reality into a poetic myth so that his own transformation from bat to peacock is a refraction of his subject matter. This section is divided into ten sections, numbered from zero through nine, which, not so incidentally, is the number of heavens in Dante's *Paradiso*, one of the many ghosts which haunt this poem. In *Mirabel* the shades of three dead people—W. H. Auden; Maria Demertzi Mitsotaki, an Athenian friend of JM and DJ and the daughter of a former Greek prime minister; and Robert Morse, a neighbor and friend from Stonington, Connecticut—become central. And a basic theme is fully defined: that there must be ''POEMS OF SCIENCE'' (the supernatural characters speak upper case, a convention which, strange to say, is not at all bothersome). At first, JM is appalled at the notion (''To squint through those steel-rimmed/Glasses of the congenitally slug-/Pale boy at school, with his precipitates,/His fruit flies and his slide rule?'').

> Not for nothing had the Impressionists
> Put subject-matter in its place, a mere
> Pretext for iridescent atmosphere.
> Why couldn't Science, in the long run, serve
> As well as one's uncleared lunch-table or
> *Mme X en Culotte de Matador?*

Mirabel ends with a serene meditation by JM, to which I will return, and the appearance of the Archangel Michael, one of the key figures of the next book, *Scripts for the Pageant*. *Scripts* is divided, typically, into three subsections, ''Yes,'' ''&,'' ''No.'' In this poem everything is dialectical, from matter (which is white and black, order and chaos), through images (which, like photographs, are positives of a negative and vice versa), to Michael (who is good, but perhaps a sentimental liberal) and his sometimes antagonist, the angel Gabriel (who destroys, but perhaps as a necessary work for the sustaining of life).

In *Scripts*, another shade joins the group: George Cotzias, a Greek scientist. Buddha, Ahknaton, Jesus, Homer, Montezuma, Plato, and a false Mohammed also put in significant appearances. (Plato is, for reasons which will not be explained here, major.) This is the book in which the chaos-order antagonism is explored and it ends as JM and DJ break a mirror—and thereby their relationship with Auden, Maria, and George. The coda (*The Higher Keys*) ties up various loose ends but also focuses upon the rebirth of Robert Morse who, in his new guise (which includes a clubfoot, one more sign of the unity of this imperfect world and its ethereal interpretation), will be a great composer. As JM prepares to read *The Changing Light* to twenty-six spirits, including Dante, Jane Austen, and Proust ''. . . a star trembles in the full carafe/As the desk light comes on, illuminating/The page I open to.'' The lectern lamp—the ordinary—becomes a star. As bats turn into peacocks and science into poetry, the poet goes back to the beginning and ends with the first word, ''Admittedly. . . .''

BEFORE MOVING to some of the most important particulars within this extraordinary structure, I should acknowledge some problems. Merrill is possessed, he himself understands, of an ''unrelenting fluency,'' a talent to turn everything into ''slant, weightless gold.'' But does one, then, confuse a craftsman's formal genius with deep meanings, knowing with Merrill that ''affection's/Poorest object, set in perfect light/By happenstance, grows irreplaceable''? Bob Adelman, a photographer friend and collaborator, once said to me that you should not cover a war with color film since the carnage will come out vividly beautiful.

That is a problem with Merrill; it is also a glory. For instance, in *Scripts* he describes a changing of the light in a supernatural schoolroom: ''not/The lights we've seen according to thus far/—Spectral gems, first waters of a star—/But Light like bread, quotidian, severe,/Wiped of the sugar sprinkles of Vermeer; . . .'' And there is ubiquitous wit in this poem, sometimes as frivolous as a pun, sometimes more ingenious as when Jane Austen addresses the newly dead Robert Morse ''As *Mr. Robert*—a shrewd estimate./ He's after all not Heir to the Estate,/Its goods and duties, but a Younger Son/Free to be ornamental and have fun.'' My greatest difficulty is not, however, aesthetic but political. *The Changing Light* has, as we will see, a very explicit political

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content: anti-nuclear, environmental, and sometimes a kind of upper-class, elitist Malthusianism. It is that last attitude, I will suggest, that creates problems.

WITH THESE qualifications, let me return to the poem and a very basic question: what is it "about"? One answer is, the changing light at Sandover. The name, Sandover, we are told, is a corruption of the French, Saintefleur, or the Italian Santofior, "An English branch of that distinguished tree/ Through whose high leaves light pulses and whose roots/Rove beyond memory." It is, as "WHA" (the shade of Auden) suggests, the community of art and spirit which lies beyond doing your own thing, the "ROSEBRICK MANOR" of language and culture whose family includes Shakespeare and Emily Dickinson. "IT WAS," WHA says, "THE GREATEST PRIVILEGE TO HAVE HAD/A BARE LOWCEILINGED MAID'S ROOM AT THE TOP." "Sandover" is also the ouija board and, I suspect, the heavenly flower at the end of the *Paradiso*. But, for my present purpose, its most significant meaning is the heritage of culture, and that relates to one of the central myths of *Mirabel* and to one of the basic theories of the age.

It was, Mirabel tells JM and DJ, language, culture, which marked the beginning of the transition "OF THE TWO BASIC APECHILDREN" toward humanity. Emile Durkheim, and Friederich Nietzsche, both of whom thought grammar a key to God, would agree; so would Wittgenstein and, in our day, Jurgen Habermas. So signal gave way to sign and then sign became symbol and symbol music and the "REASONED INDIRECTION" of the garden of human culture was on the way. But now, the old symbols lose their power and we move from symbols back toward signs: the clock face, Henri Lefebvre remarks, at least imitated the revolutions of the day; the digital watch is pure information. But if, to go back to Merrill, "IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD" and now the word is no longer what is was, how are we to face our crises as the light changes in our culture?

Without the sustaining myths, Mirabel tells JM, "MAN IS AMOK & CHAOS SLIPS IN (UPON/COLLAPSE, IN INTELLIGENT MEN, OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF)." That is hardly an original thought, and a theologian like Bultmann is more radical than Merrill in his demythologizing. But what Merrill makes of this commonplace—both as poetry and poetic meaning—is anything but a cliché. The past two or three hundred years, JM comments, "have seen a superhuman/All-shaping Father dwindle (as in Newman)/To ghostly, disputable Essence or/ Some shaggy-browed, morality play bore/(As in the Prologue to Faust)." And then there comes a key intuition (it is, I will suggest later, central to the entire poem):

> Why should God speak? How humdrum what he says
> Next to His word: out of a black sleeve, lo!
> Sun, Earth and Stars in eloquent dumb show.
> Our human words are weakest, I would urge,
> When He resorts to them."

But if God is in crisis, so is literature. The old vocabulary becomes stale, "translucent, half-effaced," but science creates a new language: ". . . through Wave, Ring, Bond, through Spectral Lines/And Resonances blows a breath of life,/Lifting the pleated garment." Since JM, openly acknowledging his debt to Matthew Arnold thinks the scribe must replace the priest, it is therefore incumbent on the poet to marry science and poetry (and music), matter and man, nature and spirit, to reconcile all the dialectical contraries. It is necessary, WHA argues, to bring "WM CARLOS WM'S THOUGHT THINGS /& THE COLD VIRGIN VERB OF MALLARME/ TOGETHER. . . ." One must, JM puts it, "tell round what brass tacks the old silk frays."

In confronting this challenge, JM presents three new God(s). First there is the God who holds back the chaos: a distant figure, not at all as human and compelling as Mother Nature in her best mood (Nature, for JM as for the Greeks, is a trinity). The second God reminds me of the divinity defined by Hegel in the *Phenomenology*: an imminent transcendence which develops historically, not simply in nature (which would be a rather simple pantheism) but in the evolution of nature and man. As WHA puts it ". . . GOD B IS NOT/ONLY HISTORY BUT EARTH ITSELF. HE IS THE GREENHOUSE." JM is, I think, even more daring: God B

> (Who, lacking human volubility,
> *Has* no word for His own power and grace;
> Who, left alone, falls back on flimflam
> Tautologies like *I am that I am*
> Or *The world is everything that is the case*);

That is remarkable: to equate the God of Abraham and the empirical reality of Wittgenstein. But then I suspect Wittgenstein might have agreed even though he insisted that this was a matter upon which one must keep silent.

This second, "Hegelian" God is described more prosaically—more scientifically—by the Archangel Michael at the close of *Mirabel*. The genius of life is, he says, its responsiveness to the sun "AND SO AS YOU FACE THE SETTING SUN YOU FACE YOUR ANCESTOR." Cells accumulated energy through the suncycles and "THIS ACCUMULATED ENERGY BECOMES THROUGH EONS AN ANCIENT AND IMMORTAL INTELLIGENCE . . . AND AT LAST AFTER EXPERIMENT THIS INTELLIGENCE FORMED MAN./THIS IS GOD'S NAME." And yet, for all of the demythologizing, *The Changing Light* is a religious poem. In a commentary on Michael's cosmology, Maria says:

> FOR MICHAEL/SUN
> READ GENERATIVE FORCE. FOR GENERATIVE FORCE
> READ: RADIATION TO THE BILLIONTH POWER
> OF EXPLODING ATOMS. FOR EMMANUEL,
> H2O. FOR SEEDS, THAT COSMIC DUST
> LADEN WITH PARTICLES OF INERT MATTER.
> FOR GOD READ: GOD.

Ultimately, all the scientific myths—and for that matter, the scientific non-myths—encounter the mystery of the beginning. Kant was, and is, right (and on this count, Hegel agreed with him): you cannot deduce the infinite from the finite. But JM—and Wittgenstein—are right, too: one can imagine in silence or in poetry, a godly source of that beginning. *The Changing Light* does more than that. It projects a supernatural effort to help humans toward an earthly paradise, in part

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through biology—the "no accident clause" of DNA, time standing still in the clockwork of genes—and in part through an otherworldly research lab, making use of the reborn, reapportioned souls of the great dead.

There was, I thought, more than a little poetic license in all of this. Wasn't the transmigration of souls merely a way of saying that Shakespeare and Buddha still live in us? But then I happened to read the comments of a French scientist, Claude Allegre, in an article in *Le Monde:* "To know that the stars are immense nuclear laboratories whose activities continually change the chemical composition of our galaxy . . . to discover that the physical laws which rule liquid crystals, a plate of spaghetti, a pile of sand are finally the same . . . these are some of the elements which today infuse the most profound human thought."

SCIENCE, THEN, is becoming science fiction and *The Changing Light* with its "R" (for Research) Lab where new types are cloned is not so otherworldly. But it is here, in the domain of the science God, that the elitist neo-Malthusianism emerges. Of course, the bomb and nuclear power are a threat to human existence; of course, the sense of the holiness of the environment is perhaps the most genuine and spontaneous religious emotion of these times; and of course there must be a limit to population. But to blame and despise the mass of the "breeders" is another thing. Mirabel makes the essentially aristocratic point: "A MERE TWO MILLION CLONED SOULS LISTEN TO EACH OTHER WHILE/OUTSIDE THEY HOWL AND PRANCE SO RECENTLY OUT OF THE TREES." At the time when Malthus wrote, attacking decency toward the poor as an incentive to excess population, most enlightened Britons thought my Irish forebears—and James Joyce's, more to the point—a race of savages.

There were even those—Nassau Senior, for instance—who thought that the Irish did not die in sufficient numbers during the Potato Famine to restore the proper economic equilibrium between food supply and the "demand" for life. WHA, in welcoming the coming of the "alphas" (from *Brave New World*) asks, "WHAT OF THE OMEGAS?/3 BILLION OF EM UP IN SMOKE POOR BEGGARS?" And JM interjects: "Wystan, how *can* you?" The reply comes: "COURAGE: GABRIEL/KNOWS WHAT HE'S UP TO & (LIKE TIME) WILL TELL." When humans thus play God they take on too great a responsibility, to put it mildly. In fairness, JM has his doubts—and I presume James Merrill does, too—and the worst statements are made by assorted angels and shades.

I don't want to be priggish. Some of the poem's perceptions of the problems of mass society are insightful enough. Finishing this essay in Venice, tramping as a member of the democratic mass through the aristocratic precincts of the Doge's Palace, I would be a hypocrite to deny that an occasional snobbish thought occurred to me. But then the thought was dismissed as both unworthy and untrue, for the point is to expand the human potential of the billions—just as we have already in fact expanded the potential of the millions, including me.

All of this raises the truly vexed question of the relation between art and politics. How does one deal with Ezra Pound's beautiful evocation of the corruption of art by money in the *Cantos* when one knows that it is quite likely inspired by fascist nonsense about the Jewish bankers? Or with the poignance in Brecht's Stalinist play—an agitprop play at that—on the Chinese Revolution? I do not want to equate Merrill's ambivalent and liberal elitism with fascism or Stalinism, yet the problem it poses is similar to the one raised by Pound and Brecht.

Of course one doesn't judge a work of art by political standards. Marx well understood that Balzac, the reactionary, was a greater novelist than Zola, the socialist. And there can be a sort of "willing suspension of disbelief"—I think. But then Balzac's monarchism does not threaten me while neo-Malthusianism does. Whatever the high theoretical solution to the problem, I must confess that I was aesthetically put off by the suggestion—and it is not made by JM himself—that a famine in Africa may be part of a benign plan for the future.

I REGRET THIS CRITICISM for the objectionable material arises precisely because Merrill is becoming more socially concerned. The transition from *Ephraim* to *Mirabel* is, in part, a shift from the more personal to the more public and it marks a gain in power—it is one of the reasons why this strange poem may be truly great. If in one aspect of that excellent transition Merrill nods as politician and utopian more than as poet, that is to be noted and regretted; it should not be a reason for turning against *The Changing Light*.

In this spirit, I conclude, then, with one of the finest passages in the poem, a key to Merrill's third God and his basic meaning. I cite but a few lines of this magnificent meditation, first about DNA:

> The world was everything that was the case?
> Open the case. Lift out the fabulous
> Necklace, in form a spiral molecule
> Whose sparklings outmaneuver time, space, us.

Then JM explains that Hell in German means bright

> —So that my father's cheerful, 'Go to Hell',
> Long unheard, and Vaughan's unbeatable
> 'They are all gone into a world of light'
> Come, even now at times, to the same thing—

But how will Hell—in that double meaning—render what it owes? That is, JM thinks, a "quaint idiom," perhaps "from the parchment of some old scribe of the apocalypse." So then one must

> . . . render *it* as long rendering to
> Light of this very light stored by our cells
> These past five million years, these past five minutes
> Here by the window, taking in through panes
> Still bleary from the hurricane a gull's
> Ascending aureole of decibels,
> As numberless four-pointed brilliancies
> Upon the Sound's mild silver grid come, go?
> The message hardly needs decoding, so
> Sheer the text, so innocent and fleet

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These overlapping pandemonia:
Birdlife, leafplay, rockface, waterglow
Lending us their being, till the given
Moment comes to render what we owe.

In Paris at the Beaubourg earlier in the summer, I saw a series of Kandinsky paintings assembled to show his progression (which I am not sure was a progression in this case) from representational to non-representational art. The first painting was of a woods, and the light makes a marvelous pattern upon the dark ground. That, it struck me, was what all Kandinsky's work was about: the light in the woods was the *donnée*, all else was implicit in it. So with Merrill. His third God is reality, the world that is the case, but enchanted, sheer, innocent, and fleet with its overlapping pandemonia. A page earlier, the same insight in different language:

Things look out at us from a spell
They themselves have woven.

That is, I think, Merrill's perception of God, and it pervades—it illuminates—every page of one of the most extraordinary poems of our times, a theology for the godless and godly.

Screen

TOO FAR GONE

ROBERT BRESSON & ALAIN TANNER

TWO NEW FILMS by old masters at the New York Film Festival seemed to me to suffer the same fate. Neither was able to go the distance, or rather, each went too great a distance. Both should have been over sooner than they were. A protracted ending diminished the effect of what had come before. One was Robert Bresson's *L'Argent*, which begins in a very promising way. Drawing its theme from a Tolstoy story entitled "*Faux Billet*," the movie at first follows the migrations of some forged money as it is passed from two teenagers to a shop owner and then from him to his oil delivery man. Into this story are drawn a number of other people—a shop assistant, the teenagers' parents, the delivery man's wife—who are all either corrupted or ruined by their contact with the fake currency.

The premise of this plot is very like a wonderful Expressionist movie of the late 1920s called *Überfall*, about a coin that passes from hand to hand among the low life of a German city. It is a premise strikingly appropriate to Bresson's style as a filmmaker. The characteristic Bresson frame is an empty one, a medium shot in which the camera lingers on the scene for a few moments after the actors have departed. Bresson's movies are about absence; they are about the life of the spirit that pervades the world only beyond or between or after physical presences. And in *L'Argent*, he begins with a story that also has at its center a kind of void. It is a story that revolves not around a single character or momentous event, but only around a handful of forged bills, a mere prop, an inert detail of the type on which his camera might rest after the actors had walked from the frame. The plot therefore has a certain integrity like that of Bresson's style. Style and content complement each other. It is an auspicious beginning.

But then the film begins eliminating characters, concentrating more and more on just one figure, the delivery man, Yvon (Christian Patey). It is he who gets caught with the bills, and the consequences so utterly transform his life that Bresson wants us to see him as a totally different, debased character at the end . To get this across, Bresson begins to make a whole new movie in the last quarter of *L'Argent*. He introduces a new character who lives outside the tainted universe in which we have been so far. The film leaves behind several unfinished stories of characters about whom we would like to have known more. It creates in their stead a completely innocent old woman whose only purpose in life, or at least in this film, is to be Yvon's victim. Thus does Bresson sacrifice—indeed, throw away—that integrity of plot, character, and style that seemed so fine at the beginning. I'm saddened to say that this is the pattern this great director's whole career has been taking in his last couple of films.

THE OTHER FILM doesn't end as badly as Bresson's does; and yet it, too, might better have ended sooner. It is Alain Tanner's *In the White City*. The film is about a ship's engineer named Paul (Bruno Ganz) who has a port of call in Lisbon, "the white city." He checks into a pension on the harbor. He goes drinking and chats with some whores. He gets into a scuffle in a bar. He chats up a chamber maid and begins sleeping with her. He rides the tram and walks the streets, not really touring, just wandering around. He lets his ship sail without him.

It's apparent from fairly early in the film that Paul is cracking up. The dissolution of his mind is slow, unspectacular, almost imperceptible at times. There are moments of action, as when he's followed from a snooker parlor and mugged because he's left his wallet sticking out, almost as if he were inviting such a catastrophe. But most of the time, nothing ostensible is happening. Paul sits on the little balcony of his room and plays his harmonica. He goest out to dinner with the chambermaid, Rosa (Teresa Madruga), and her friends, all of whom babble in Portuguese, a language he doesn't understand. Drunk and alone, he falls out of bed in the middle of the night, then stumbles to his feet and smashes whisky bottles against the wall. Or he just stares out at the harbor.

The room in which he lives is big and bare and rather empty. The harbor outside is the same, which is why Tanner is attracted to it as a background. In Tanner's films, the physical place, the geographical location, means as much as the action. The place is part of the action, as the title of his best earlier color film, *Le Milieu du Monde*, suggests. (It's about a town that is topographically central and spiritually on the periphery, almost off the map.) Both the harbor and the city of Lisbon are "white" in this film; they are a blank, a void, and therefore a

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fitting set for the emptiness we see beginning to open inside Paul. The film itself does not become aimless like Paul's life because of the subtlety not only of Tanner's script and direction, but of Bruno Ganz's acting. Tanner shot the story in chronological order so that Ganz could feel Paul's malaise grow within him, so that he could feel his way toward the signs of it in his performance. As Paul becomes more and more irresolute, the film becomes more intense.

While Paul is drifting into these uncharted emotional waters, Tanner gives us only a few compass points by which to keep our own bearings. These take the form of a series of home movies that Paul makes and sends to his wife in Switzerland. This is a brilliant device. In the first reel, made aboard ship, Paul hands the camera to someone else. The result is a typical postcard in motion-picture form—awkward, hesitant, self-conscious. But just the fact that Tanner includes these blown-up Super-8s in his film introduces an eerily subjective element into our experience of Paul. In the next reel that Paul begins, just after going ashore, he holds the camera at arm's length in order to film himself as he walks along. The subjective element is increased. In the home movies now, we see both the world and Paul himself from his own point of view. By the third reel he shoots, his point of view has become the only discernible subject. The movies this time are shots of the cobblestones passing under the tram or waves beneath the ferryboat in the harbor. They are images without differentiation or order or structure, images that are "white," like the city.

I would have ended the film here, but Tanner goes on, providing Paul with a recovery of sorts and ending with a fourth insert of Super-8 footage. This one is made as Paul is on the way home to Switzerland, after he has sold his camera to settle his hotel bill. In a sense this takes the subjective experience one step further, for now the movies exist *only* in Paul's mind. Nothing is definite in this ending. The film remains true to its earlier ambiguities. On the other hand, this last home movie is also an intervention on Tanner's part. The director admitted this at a Festival press conference. The final image is one in which, he said, "I myself am appropriating the world as a filmmaker." But this is inappropriate. Tanner's best work, like Bresson's, has depended on self-restraint. We give ourselves over to the film and trust it because we believe implicitly that the filmmaker will not meddle in his characters' fate. In these new films, the trust seems to be betrayed. We can feel the director manipulating the story and the cinematography. Each man has, for once, gone too far. A good beginning has, for each, led to a disappointment.

COLIN L. WESTERBECK, JR.

Books: FICTION, HISTORY, TRAGEDY

DISTURBANCES IN THE FIELD

Lynne Sharon Schwartz
Harper & Row, $14.95, 384 pp.

Carole Cook

. . . By what process of logical accretion was this slight "personality," the mere slim shade of an intelligent but presumptuous girl, to find itself endowed with the high attributes of a Subject?—and indeed by what thinness, at the best, would such a subject not be vitiated? Millions of presumptuous girls, intelligent or not intelligent, daily affront their destiny, and what is open to their destiny to be, at the most, that we should make an ado about it?

THE SPEAKER here is Henry James, the occasion one of the prefaces to the 1916 New York edition of *Portrait of a Lady*, and the slight personality is Isabel

Archer, whose sensible confrontation of her destiny comprises one of the exemplary novels of the English language. This is also the essay that presents James's vision of the novel as a house with many windows, and a strong reaffirmation of his 1884 "The Act of Fiction," which controverted the idea that a novel requires a high moral purpose. To

(Continued on page 601)

SHAME

Salman Rushdie
Knopf, $13.95, 318 pp.

Una Chaudhuri

SALMAN RUSHDIE'S last book, *Midnight's Children*, was a triumph of novelistic inclusiveness. Mixing history and fantasy, memory and desire, it ranged over a whole subcontinent's peoples, places, and dreams, its extraordinary scope matched by an astonishing repertory of moods and styles. In that novel, Rushdie evoked India not only through what it is and what it imagines, but also through what it is no longer: the lost bits of its past that remain to haunt it, like hazy reflections of itself.

Not least of these insistent ghosts is the country—now countries—that India spawned at Independence. In *Midnight's Children*, Pakistan was the Other Place, a potential haven, retreat or exile for the protagonist, a plan of marginal existence and self-forgetting. In his new novel,

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Shame, Rushdie returns to this borderline world, giving a voice to one of modern history's saddest accidents: "the famous moth-eaten partition that chopped up the old country and handed Al-Lah a few insect-nibbled slices of it, some dusty western acres and jungly eastern swamps that the ungodly were happy to do without."

The country of *Shame*, we are told, is "not Pakistan, or not quite," and indeed the condition of not-quite-existing defines everything about it: it is a place marked by marginality, its inhabitants certain of nothing except their radical peripherality. Thus Omar Khayyam Shakil, the novel's not-quite-hero, suffers from an unusual vertigo: convinced that he lives on the edge of the world, he is forever terrified of slipping off the brink.

Peripherality, too, is the essence of this land's deepest psychology and the novel's true hero: Shame. It is the doom of those who cannot exist except as reflections of others' perceptions, of those who are unable to credit the notion of individual moral autonomy, and Rushdie finds it everywhere: "You can find shame in every house, burning in an ashtray, hanging framed upon a wall, covering a bed."

Unable or unwilling to play the lead in his own story, Omar cedes that place of honor (and shame—honor's second name) to others: to Iskander Harappa, the debonair and debauched playboy who turns himself into the archetypal "great man" and is elected prime minister, and to General Raza Hyder, once Harappa's protégé, later his executioner. As self-proclaimed CMLA (the initials, people begin to say, no longer stand for Chief Martial Law Administrator but for *Cancel My Last Announcement*), Hyder transforms what had begun as a godly dream into a shameful nightmare. But he is victim as well as perpetrator: in his right ear he hears the ceaseless voice of Allah, reduced to the senile babblings of an old mullah, whereas his left ear is filled at all times with the sibilant, whispered Machiavellianisms of the murdered Harappa. In anguish Raza covers his head and vainly screams for silence.

Silence and invisibility become, inevitably, the pursuit and desire of all the inhabitants of this shame-ridden country. Omar's three mothers, incarcerating themselves for life in their decaying family mansion, are only the most vividly self-effacing. Others, like Bilquis Hyder, develop manias for shutting windows. Still others withdraw from life more conventionally—they disappear, or die. For the rest there is the veil, costume of modest women, of escaping ousted dictators—and of shame.

Shame has as vast and exotic a cast of characters as *Midnight's Children*, and it is as rich in incident, yet it is a wholly different sort of book. History here is a collective fantasy clinging to the dusty deserts and dilapidated cities of reality, not emanating from the wild imagination of a single, terribly self-conscious narrator. The laughter it provokes is consequently edged with a familiar pain and the marvels it contains are never free of palpable horror.

Most appalling of these is the novel's heroine, Hyder's daughter-who-should-have-been-a-son. Brainless, bestial, immeasurably violent, she is the embodiment of shame itself, and though she prowls around the edges of the story for most of the time, she is the monstrous referent and ultimate ground of all its dark visions. Into this image Rushdie has packed a wealth of psychological insight, for Sufiya Zinobia is the utterly convincing and terrifying product of a culture lost in falsehood and corruption.

Shame is a profoundly disturbing book. Courageously, Rushdie has resisted the temptation to write another exuberant epic. Instead, he has created a concentrated and dark masterpiece, an answer to those who may claim that certain evils of modern history are beyond either representation or translation. Rushdie is intensely aware of such claims, and begins his journey into these evils with a refusal to submit to that which causes them—peripherality and shame: "*Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject!* . . . I know: nobody ever arrested me. Nor are they ever likely to. *Poacher! Pirate! We reject your authority. We know you, with your foreign language wrapped around you like a flag: speaking about us in your forked tongue, what can you tell but lies?* I reply with more questions: Is history to be considered the property of the participants solely? . . . Can only the dead speak?" With *Shame*, Rushkie vindicates the claim staked in *Midnight's Children* to a place in the company of such writers as Gunter Grass, Milan Kundera, and V.S. Naipaul, who are giving modern history a forceful voice.

Surpassing depth, in a one-dimensional day

THE GLORY OF THE LORD
A THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS,
VOL. I: SEEING THE FORM

Hans Urs von Balthasar
Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis
Ignatius/Crossroad, $35, 691 pp.

THE VON BALTHASAR READER

Edited by Medard Mehl & Werner Loser, translated by Robert Daly & Fred Lawrence
Crossroad, $27.50, 437 pp.

Robert Imbelli

THE FOLLOWING EXCHANGE was reported to me, as I was reading the two volumes under review. Somewhat precocious eleven-year-old: "What does it mean when we say in the Apostles' Creed, 'He descended into hell'?" Religion teacher, age unknown: "Don't worry about it; they're going to drop it from the Creed, because no one knows what it means."

Hans Urs von Balthasar would savor the irony of introducing his monumental volumes with such a bagatelle. Stripped of scholarly trappings, it sums up the wanton dissipation of the full Catholic inheritance which his work has attempted to forestall. But the anecdote also bears a deeper irony. The very article of the creed which it dismisses as meaningless offers von Balthasar the deeper disclosure of the mystery of God's love and of human salvation: a God who pursues the sinner to the extremes of estrangement

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and there reconciles, not through act of power but through loving presence which takes pain and rage upon itself. Holy Saturday, the descent into hell, stands, therefore, as the keystone of the paschal mystery: God descends to the disfigured depths of human need, there to consummate the wedding feast with humanity: "Come, my love, my fair one . . . the winter is over and done."

Von Balthasar's great multi-volumed work, *Herrlichkeit, The Glory of the Lord*, whose first volume, dating from 1961, has finally appeared in English translation, bears the programmatic designation "a theological aesthetics." As such it presents a systematic approach to theology under the rubric of the *beautiful*: an approach whose genius is to lead the believer beyond mere hearing and adhesion to content-rich seeing and delight. (The translation of six additional volumes of *The Glory of the Lord*, which develop and exemplify the theological vision set forth in volume one, is promised over the next two years.)

Volume One, *Seeing the Form*, unfolds this aesthetic sensitivity both from the standpoint of subjective perception and appreciation and from that of objective form and content. Thus in the great debate between Barth and Bultmann concerning the primacy of Word or faith, object or subject—a debate characterized as signaling "the divided mind of modern theology"—von Balthasar contributed a truly original aesthetic integration. However, the character of the Balthasarian synthesis clearly favors the objective form and structure of God's revelation, issuing in an "objectivism" which is not simply Barthian, but which is "proper to the Catholic principle" and which itself dictates a properly theological method.

Hence, *Seeing the Form* culminates in a splendid depiction of "Christ the Centre of the Form of Revelation," in which the glory of God on the face of Christ is meditatively explored. In the light of this Christic fullness the intimations of revelation embodied in both creation and culture take on new clarity and substance, thus receiving from von Balthasar a more positive reading than ever Barth allowed. Nonetheless, the manifestation of the fullness of the form in Christ both recapitulates and determines all else and truly enraptures the beholder.

Such sensitivity to the "enrapturing" which form effects brings into relief a further characteristic of von Balthasar's theological project: its contemplative quality. Theology, he holds, is contemplation brought to conceptualization, issuing from prayer and leading to prayer. Not only does von Balthasar deprecate the rift, developing over centuries, between theology and spirituality; his work marks the most sustained effort by a twentieth-century Catholic theologian to repair it, by the impassioned placement, at the heart of that work, of the living Object of prayer. Moreover, and in complete harmony with this sensitivity, the only truly convincing verification of Christianity and its theological vision is, for von Balthasar, the saint. The orthopraxis of sanctity prevents a theological aesthetics from degenerating into mere aestheticism; while the communion of saints ultimately justifies and tests all programs of institutional reform. For the most consummate aesthetic work realized in every generation is the saint transformed according to the cruciform image of Christ.

Von Balthasar's synthesis of Barthian theological objectivity with the anthropological approach associated with a Schleiermacher or a Rahner represents a considerable achievement; for it articulates a comprehensive trinitarian vision in which both Word and Spirit receive equal due. At the same time it sounds a whole-hearted incarnational commitment which confutes the "primal lie" of theology and spirituality: the equation of the spiritual with the incorporeal rather than with a redeemed and transformed corporeality. Against this Platonizing deformation of Christianity's sacramental vision, von Balthasar counterpoises a remarkable rehabilitation of the patristic and medieval doctrine of the spiritual senses as a prelude to that eschatological consummation when all flesh shall see God.

The spacious structure which von Balthasar erects upon these theological foundations is at once simple and soaring, most akin to those Johannine writings which are his predilection. Here *The von Balthasar Reader* performs signal service; for it presents well-chosen, systematically arranged selections from the whole of the Balthasarian *oeuvre*, in passages of from two to seven pages brimming with theological and spiritual nourishment. The *Reader*, prefaced by an excellent and helpful essay-portrait of the theologian and his work, will certainly introduce the Swiss theologian to a wider public in a format attractive and accessible; while *Seeing the Form* will offer the more specialized student profound theological and aesthetic pleasure.

My very positive assessment of von Balthasar's massive undertaking does not, of course, imply an absence of faults. There is a leisurely repetitiveness to *Seeing the Form* which makes an already considerable volume overly long. In his admirable attempt to counteract the totalitarian pretensions of certain exercises of historical critical biblical scholarship, von Balthasar engages in a rather idiosyncratic reading of some texts which only succeeds in undermining his, to my mind, legitimate position. The generous treatment accorded the chosen perspective of theological aesthetics will appear to some to ignore the political concerns brought to the fore in contemporary theologies of liberation. (Though one wonders whether politics itself might be more humanized were it founded upon a truly aesthetic vision.) Finally, though von Balthasar, writing in the early 1960s could not be expected to reflect some of the present-day feminist sensitivities, the otherwise competent translator of *Seeing the Form* might have employed more inclusive language (as, in fact, his equally competent fellow-translators of *The von Balthasar Reader* succeeded in doing).

Yet I contend that these faults fade before the monumental achievement. For what finally appears is a Christic and ecclesial vision of surpassing depth and fruitfulness; in light of which so much which passes for contemporary theology seems meager and one-dimensional. Von Balthasar's Catholic vision resolutely refuses the prevalent political and ecclesiastical reductionisms and gleans authentically contemporary insights

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from the rich harvest of Christian experience and reflection through the ages. His systematic theology admits of further fertile unfolding because the center is both rich and secure. Today, when the synoptic gospels are being rightly recovered, von Balthasar boldly and radically proclaims that the Johannine vision remains normative for Catholic Christianity.

Twenty years ago, Bernard Lonergan directed the attention of this reviewer, then a new student of theology, to the work of von Balthasar as representing a style of theologizing more "affective" and "personalist" than Lonergan's own. It is a pleasure to extend to a wider audience that invitation to taste this delectable wisdom theology. Today the invitation even takes on a note of urgency: "Come to the feast!"

Retelling and retrying

MAN SLAUGHTER
STEVEN ENGLUND
Doubleday $17.95, 419 pp.

Kevin M. Doyle

THE 1978 Wisconsin trial of Jen Patri for shooting her estranged husband, Bob Patri, gained national attention through a self-defense claim grounded in a battered-wife "history." Defense attorney Alan Eisenberg pulled feminist groups and media aboard his adversarial bandwagon and attempted to run it through, or over, the small town of Waupaca. Along the way, Eisenberg picked up Steven Englund to write a book on the Patri case.

Man Slaughter's story tells how social movements and criminal defenses use and abuse each other and how lawyers tailor reality to make cases. Englund vividly describes the manipulation of defense facts to fit feminist concerns for battered wives. The book illustrates well both the inevitability and imperfectibility of criminal defense-social-cause partnerships. The book's greatest strength is not, however, its treatment of the mismarriage of lawyer and lobbyist. The author is best when reminding us of the law's inability to capture or reflect moral nuance.

For *Man Slaughter* is two books, one good, one not so good. First, the good one: *Man Slaughter* is a well-researched and well-recounted story. It tells of a hardworking small-town farmer and mother who, accused of killing the only man she had ever loved, becomes a feminist heroine/martyr through her attorney's creative defense efforts.

Through extensive interviews, Englund uncovered the flesh and blood people behind the Patri controversy. In what is a second book he then juxtaposes these lives with the caricatures and

On December 8, 1870, a man walked into St. Peter's, ostentatiously lit a cigar from the high altar, and sacrilegiously blew out all the candles.

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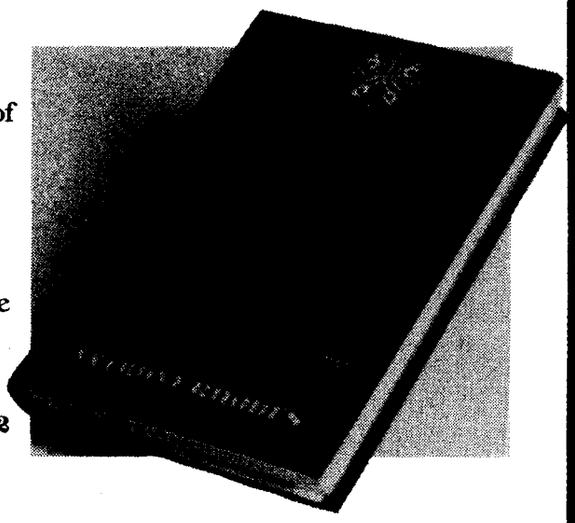

THE POWER OF ROME
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
The Vatican in the Age of Liberal Democracies 1870-1922
BY ANTHONY RHODES

FRANKLIN Watts
At your bookstores now Hardcover $17.95
387 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016

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scripts proffered at trial. I suspect the *Patri* juries (there was a murder and related arson trial) wouldn't recognize the actual people Englund emphatically portrays. For behind defense and prosecution theories, both deceased and accused emerge as victims. Englund suggests Bob Patri was not Eisenberg's wife-beater but simply a neglectful husband and father who let his marriage wither. Jen, from a childhood riddled with incest and poverty, could not, in Englund's scenario, surrender the alliance she had forged with Bob against a malignant world. She certainly could not watch Bob emotionally mature with another woman, the book's third protagonist, and so killed in hopelessness and helplessness.

Englund's tale is one of lost loves and lives. The personal tragedy shows the inadequacy of the law's clear distinction between guilt and innocence. By illuminating the concrete situation the story evokes that moral ambiguity we all know the law ignores or smothers. Englund's juxtaposition works so well, however, only because his writing delivers. As a storyteller, Englund compares with Mailer or Capote—or even a less-manic Tom Wolfe.

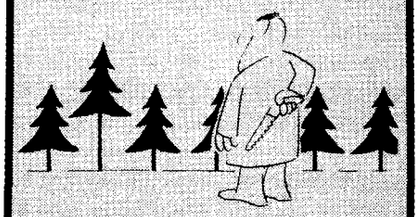
For the second book inside *Man Slaughter*, Englund forgoes storytelling. This lesser book is a retrial of *State v. Patri*. It doesn't just raise questions or tragic possibilities but deals in conclusions and evidentiary probabilities.

In a sense, Englund adds attorney Eisenburg and his defense to the docket for retrial. As trier of facts, the author focuses more on holes in the defense than on the holes the defense pokes in the State's case. Misapplication of burdens of proof, however, is not the reason the retrial aborts. It fails really for the same reason the *Patri* case makes an interesting story.

The issues are human and "soft." The case turns on perceptions of personalities and judgments of character. Englund's verdict thus rests largely on post-trial personal encounters with witnesses which the reader cannot fully share. Englund must ask we trust him as he concludes Jen Patri's self-defense plea was a combination of ideological flim-flam and character-assassination. But has he earned our trust because he brought a pro-Jen Patri, feminist prejudice to his investigation? This logic should sound familiar. It has become a standard of literary retrials from Allen Weinstein's Hiss analysis to the Milton-Radosh *Rosenberg File*.

The pro-defendant disclaimer prefacing the literary conviction is wearing a tad thin. Moreover, Englund does not help matters by salting his early pro-defendant bias with his own ambivalence (see pp. 294-295 and 398.) Englund ultimately concedes that he demands too much trust, that retrial is a bad idea. In his final pages, he deems *Man Slaughter* not the last word or the whole word, but "my word."

Still, a weak but unmistakable retrial has marred a good story. Perhaps the author could not suspend or mute his judgments as he pried beneath the surface of the Patri case. Maybe Englund could not separate historical probing from legal opining. If he had found a way, a good book could have been a very good book.



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A fool around the house

WONDERFUL FOOL

SHUSAKU ENDO

Translated by Francis Mathy
Harper and Row/Kodansha International, $13.95, 240 pp.

Michael Gallagher

THIS early novel of Shusaku Endo differs considerably from the later historical novels that first brought him — the rarest of the rare: a Japanese Catholic intellectual — to the attention of perceptive critics outside of Japan.

Wonderful Fool, written in the early fifties and now available in Francis Mathy's fine translation, is set in the present. It's often comic and satiric. But, nonetheless, very much present are the concerns that permeate *Silence* and *The Samurai*, both set against the background of one of the fiercest and most unrelenting persecutions Christianity has ever experienced.

The time is twelve years after the 1941-45 war, a transition period when Japan's current level of gaudy prosperity and awesome industrial power is still to be attained but when, for the young at least, the desolation of the immediate postwar years is only a bad memory. It's a time when anything seems possible. Prosperity might not yet have arrived in full force, but the appetite for success and the material possessions that symbolize it is already vigorous and flourishing. (All

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of which, by the way, involved that turning away from traditional values that drove Endo's friend and fellow novelist, the brilliant and flamboyant Yukio Mishima, to the ultimate protest of seppuku in 1970.)

Into this industrious, purposeful environment comes a sign of contradiction, an awkward foreigner, a shambling giant, whose good will far exceeds his intelligence and his meager ration of common sense.

Two young Tokyo sophisticates, Takamori and Tomoe, a brother and sister, find their lives disrupted by a strange letter in wretched Japanese that arrives one pleasant Sunday morning in spring. The letter is for Takamori. It comes from Singapore and informs him that one Gaston Bonaparte, a young Frenchman, will arrive in Yokohama in three weeks. Stunned, Takamore searches his memory and remembers at last that he once had a French pen pal who was a descendant of Napoleon. Now the descendant is about to descend upon them, playing havoc with their busy, gainful routines. It's what the Japanese — like that other island people, the English — fear most: something without precedent.

Once she recovers, however, Tomoe's thoughts take a surprising turn. Despite her modern airs, sharp tongue, and her shrewd playing of the stock market, Tomoe harbors a certain old-fashioned romanticism, though she'd die if anybody, especially her feckless brother, suspected it. She does some research on Napoleon. Portraits of the real article don't impress her much, but photos of Charles Boyer and Daniel Gelin in the role are much more congenial to her fancy.

Alas, Gaston in the flesh puts to flight all such yearnings. When Tomoe and Takamori meet his ship at Yokohama, they have to descend into its very bowels to find him. And when she first glimpses his long face and hulking figure, it's only with an effort that she keeps the word "horse" from passing her lips.

Gaston's manner is as clumsy as his body. He has a knack for doing the wrong thing in a land that places a premium upon doing the right thing. He stands out in a land where the ideal is to remain as inconspicuous as possible. Takamori, however, takes Gaston pretty much in stride, insisting to his furious and discomfited sister that the foreigner has a good heart. Eventually, Tomoe does begin to come around to her brother's view. Then, too, this buffoonish giant, for all his simplicity, has an air of mystery about him. Why did he come to Japan? Certainly not as a tourist.

But just as Tomoe is reconciling herself to the idea of having a fool around the house, Gaston solemnly announces in his fragmentary Japanese that he can no longer stay with them. He must go off on his own. And so he does, the very night of the announcement, followed into the darkness by the faithful old mongrel that he has adopted and who has adopted him. There follows a series of picaresque adventures set against the background of the night side of Tokyo — a panorama of hustlers, prostitutes, and wretched poverty.

Three rough and ready women of the streets take pity upon the hapless Gaston. A gentle old fortune teller, a man who eases the lives of the poor and suffering with kindly revelations, gives him shelter. A vicious professional killer dying of tuberculosis forces him to accompany him on a mission of vengeance.

Gaston judges no one. He looks for the best in everybody, and when he finds the worst, his only reaction is a bemused and patient incomprehension. When the killer forces him to go the biblical one mile with him, Gaston goes two and still more, all the way to the distant northern province of Yamagata.

Gaston indeed has a secret, one that Endo saves until the end, but one that Julian Moynahan unfortunately chooses to tell us all about in his perceptive but busy introduction (in which he makes astounding reference to the decision of the "Emperors of Edo" to suppress Christianity, a compound error that even a casual knowledge of Japanese history would have prevented). I urge you, then, to read the introduction last.

It's giving nothing away, of course, to say that Gaston is Endo's version of the holy fool, a Christ figure much like Dostoyevsky's Prince Myshkin. The holy fool disconcerts those given over to the

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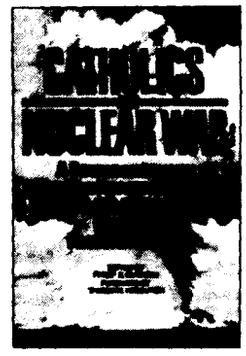

Philip Murnion, Editor

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things of this world, and, if the disconcerted are open to grace, makes them see things differently. And in this Japanese setting, a holy fool who's also a "gaijin" is all the more disconcerting.

For those who have read and appreciated Endo's other work, *Wonderful Fool* is a must, though it does have its flaws. The major difficulty has to do with the problem pointed out by Simone Weil: fictional good, as opposed to good in real life, is difficult to make attractive. Whereas evil, distasteful as it is in reality, is often fascinating in fiction.

Gaston, therefore, while not too good to be true, is perhaps too good to be interesting, at least interesting enough to sustain a novel. What gives *Wonderful Fool* its undeniable vigor, therefore, is the skill with which Endo brings to life the underside of Tokyo and draws his cast of secondary characters—Takamori and Tomoe, the prostitutes, the fortune teller, and the dying gangster.

Convergence, loneliness, & sex

YOUR SEXUAL FREEDOM
LETTERS TO STUDENTS

Richard Hettlinger
Continuum, $7.95, 127 pp.

AND THEY FELT NO SHAME
CHRISTIANS RECLAIM
THEIR SEXUALITY

Joan Ohanneson
Winston Press, $11.95, 318 pp.

Michael Zeik

HEGEL lives!

Just at the time that Catholic theologians are recognizing that, procreation aside, sexuality has still other human meanings; and that even problems like masturbation and homosexuality have to be morally evaluated in their own complicated contexts; just at that time, the *New York Times* runs front-page articles about the more conservative trend of American sexual practice; *Esquire* features an article by George Leonard noting "The End of Sex"; *New York* magazine joins in the refrain, with Fran Schumer asking, "Is Sex Dead?"; and I am given these two asymptotic books to review for *Commonweal*. Talk about your thesis, antithesis, and synthesis!

Hettlinger's *Your Sexual Freedom*, and Ohanneson's *And They Felt No Shame* bear witness to the ongoing dialectic, as the poor human race wobbles its erratic way toward a more balanced sexuality. Thus we find Ohanneson making her impassioned plea to the church to pay more mind to young adults and their sexual problem; and Hettlinger, writing out of what appears to be a rationalist, humanist position, warning college students not to confuse sexual gyrations with psychological freedom. (It is worth noting, by the way, that some of the secular humanists' second thoughts about the sexual revolution actually antedated the onslaughts of herpes and AIDS; and some revisionist moral theology similarly antedated The Pill.) A few concrete examples of the dramatic convergence of these diverse schools of thought may make the matter clearer.

The study, *Human Sexuality*, commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America in 1977, objected to the traditional moral teaching on the problem of masturbation. *Human Sexuality* distinguished between adolescent, compensatory, hedonist, and pathological masturbation, and warned that the problem was subtle and complex. Either "to condemn every act of masturbation as mortal sin, or to dismiss it lightly as of no moral consequence, fails to do justice to the symptomatic nature of masturbation capable of many meanings," the book argued.

Coming from the other direction, Hettlinger, Director of Humane Studies at Kenyon College, after first assuring the reader that masturbation is "a regular phase of human development," goes on to warn us, in the words of Morton Hunt:

> It is not truly liberated . . . to use masturbation as a continuing substitute for heterosexual relationships that are available but anxiety-producing . . Some young people who are particularly troubled by feelings of personal inadequacy and inferiority find it exceedingly difficult to take those steps to establish relationships with the opposite sex, and for them masturbation may be supportive as a crutch is, weakening rather than strengthening.

Even on the difficult problem of premarital sex, there is a degree of convergence between the rationalist approach of a Hettlinger, and the "faith-seeking-understanding" approach of the authors of *Human Sexuality*. Thus, the former, who does believe that premarital sex is justified under certain conditions, nevertheless goes on to caution students (women in particular) that "Because of the 'tyranny of statistics' you will be under great pressure to conform to majority behavior." Abstaining from sex, however, "may be a sign of real personal strength and integrity" if you wait "because you think the special intimacy and closeness of intercourse is best kept for the special commitment of marriage."

Liberal Catholic theologians, and writers like Ohanneson, on the other hand, renounce the older view that "every willful enjoyment of (sexual) pleasure before marrige is a serious deordination of one's relational life and consequently mortal sin." They seek middle ground between the traditional "global no" of moral theology, and the chaotic relativism of contemporary paganism. Not only, say these writers, do some forms of sexual expression become appropriate for people who are well along the path to permanent commitment, but a distinction may be drawn between *premarital* and *pre-ceremonial* sexual relations. Marriage, they argue, like most of life's serious decisions, does not actually take place at a moment. If two people, already totally committed to one another, are compelled through force of circumstance (finances, prolonged schooling, etc.) to postpone the actual *ceremony* of matrimony, their sexual relations might very well be justified. Such relations are pre-ceremonial rather than pre-marital.

I cannot, in the allotted space, point out the similarly converging lines of thought on such topics as homosexuality, lesbianism, etc. But note that I do not use

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the adjective "identical," only "converging." Hettlinger frequently goes far beyond the views of Catholic liberals, as he does when he admits that he is "unsure how often *chance* sexual interludes" are truly fulfilling. "Provided the people involved are honest with each other and no unwanted pregnancy or infection results, they can certainly be very satisfying."

Coming back to Ohanneson's book, I have to agree with her that the church is presently in the position of dealing with the age-group from fifteen to thirty as virtually a Foreign Mission. And the principal reason for this estrangement, she feels, is the church's inauthenticity on sexual questions. Fifty percent of the Moonies, she warns us, and forty-two percent of the Hare Krishnas, are young, alienated ex-Catholics.

Here, a caveat. I doubt that Catholic young adults have joined these sects because of their teachings on sex. As a matter of fact, from what I know about these sects, their sexual rules and regulations would have delighted the hearts of all the 1930 Irish Monsignori in America! For the unmarried, they too prescribe the "global no."

Surely it is more out of loneliness and the attraction of community that Catholic young adults join these cults. And Ohanneson deals very well with the problem of their loneliness. Americans move from one neighborhood to another on an average of about once every five years. Young adults feel it even more than other age-groups. The typical parish does not offer any solution; "budgets do not allow." But, points out Ohanneson, a budget is "a theological statement," and our young adults hear it.

Again, although I agree with the author on the desirability of optional celibacy for the priesthood, celibacy itself has more meaning for me than for her. As someone who joined the church in his twenty-fourth year, I have to say that I was surprised, upon first meeting priests and sisters, to learn that anyone took God that seriously.

After all this sexual dialectic, it is not surprising that I should come to a very Hegelian conclusion. On matters of sex, the ungraceful human race is like the drunk who, after he falls off one side of his horse, gets up and falls off the other side. I suspect the tension *between* the conservative and liberal positions is absolutely necessary. Thus, on a scale of one to ten, I give masturbation an esthetic and psychological minus three; it remains, however, sociologically superior to rape. As a liberal on my way to the great synthesis, I have to be grateful for all the conservative confrontation I can get. I know that sex is o.k. when it is "self-liberating, other-enriching, honest, faithful, socially responsible, life-serving, and joyous," but will I make the right evaluation in the back seat of a car?

All heresies are the banner of a reality, an exclusion. Scratch the heresy and you will find the leper. Every battle against heresy wants only this: to keep the leper as he is. As for the lepers, what can you ask of them? That they distinguish in the Trinitarian dogma or in the definition of the Eucharist how much is correct and how much is wrong? come, Adso, these games are for us men of learning. The simple have other problems. —*Umberto Eco*
The Name of the Rose

That which we call a rose

THE NAME OF THE ROSE

Umberto Eco

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $15.95, 502 pp.

John Ahern

IN the late fifties the young Umberto Eco, then a leader in FUCI (a kind of Italian Newman Club) published a first book on aesthetics in Aquinas. Readers of this journal may recall the fascination which the medieval synthesis, as filtered through twentieth century French sensibilities, exercised on Catholic intellectuals in the postwar period. Today Eco is famous for his work in semiotics, the science of signs, founded or refounded in this century by C. S. Peirce and Ferdinand Saussure. At present he is reported to be engaged in a study of late medieval language and sign theory. What fascinates him now—the collapse of the Scholastic Synthesis under the onslaughts of nominalists such as William of Ockham—is also the subject of this his first work of fiction.

If it surprises some that a thinker and scholar should write a popular novel set in the Middle Ages and succeed, it is in part because so little of his other work is available in English. In addition to literary criticism on Joyce, important studies of twentieth century aesthetic theory, several volumes of Barthes-like cultural essays, Eco has produced a series of brilliant, indispensable analyses of nineteenth and twentieth century popular fiction from Eugene Sue to Ian Fleming. It is hardly surprising then that he should try his hand at the genre, writing a detective story readable on several levels (historical novel, gothic romance, roman à clef, intellectual history), set it in the fourteenth century and treat in it the collapse of an elaborate Italian, Benedictine monastery under its own internal pressures and the benign, penetrating scrutiny of a laconic Anglo-Saxon intellectual, a friar in whom converge elements of Ockham, Peirce, Roger Bacon, Sherlock Holmes, and Eco himself.

The book concludes with a distich from the twelfth century Benedictine Bernard of Cluny: *stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus* 'the pristine rose is in its name, we hold naked names.' Hence its title, *The Name of the Rose*, states one of its central themes, the troubling relation of names and things, language and reality. It is more than a happy accident that a long, quintessentially medieval poem, "On Contempt of the World," should call to mind Gertrude Stein ("A rose is a rose is a rose"), Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida and semiotics. Throughout the novel the fourteenth and twentieth centuries are not so distant mirrors of each other. Which, one wonders, is the original and which

(Continued on page 600)

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Religious booknotes

Scripture & women: beyond aggiornamento

Mary Gerhart

PERHAPS one of the clearest signs that *aggiornamento* ("The church marches with the march of time") does take place is that we no longer frequently hear this once-famous slogan which rallied the Second Vatican Council. The enthusiastic use of the slogan seems to have given way to the sober realization that *aggiornamento* involves both persuasive and responsible criticism and even the reconstruction of the "vetera" of religious traditions.

In *Ministering in the Pauline Churches*, Pheme Perkins aims at two goals: a clearer account of women in

Ministering in the Pauline Churches, *by Pheme Perkins, Paulist Press, $4.95, 110 pp.*

the early Christian communities, and a demonstration that one can and should distinguish between Paul's theology (which was bold) and his adherence to current societal norms (which was cautious). Perkins holds that "the picture of women and ministry in Christian communities which emerges from the New Testament cannot be forced into any one of the ideological camps that presently divide Christians": the picture will assist neither those who want backing for the exclusion of women from ministry nor those who wish to escape all social roles and norms for behavior in the name of sexual equality. In her concluding chapter on women in early Gnostic writings, Perkins calls attention to the literature's ambiguous portrayal of women and woman's role in the community. The effect of this ambiguity is to force the reader to recognize that the role of Scripture is less to give answers than to require them.

The publisher of James Barr's *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* describes the book as demonstrating "that the criterion for biblical criticism is the text of the Bible itself, and should be placed above all systems of interpretation." The accuracy of this description is dubious on several counts, however. Barr does say that the "criterion for biblical criticism is . . . what the Bible itself

Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism, *by James Barr, Westminster Press, $18.95 (cloth), $9.95 (paper).*

actually says." But that statement is made in opposition to the "hostile critics of biblical criticism" who themselves misrepresent biblical criticism as an imposition of foreign criteria upon the text. The most important contribution of this book is its historical and theological treatment of the issue of canon. For Barr, the existence of a canon does not by itself affect the meaning of the text. His arguments turn out to be permutations of reconceived possibilities as well as reasons for and against particular positions in well known controversies: Who was right, in the long run, for example, in the Catholic-Protestant debate over the authority of tradition and Scripture. Barr addresses the difference between a theological and an historical interpretation and sees theology, in the shape of a pyramid, as distinct from and yet comprised of other disciplines.

Don't let the title of Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi's *The Sacred and the Feminine: Toward a Theology of Housework* put you off. This is one of the most original books of the year. Calling herself a feminist, Rabuzzi eschews polemics: she is interested

The Sacred and the Feminine: Toward a Theology of Housework, *by Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi, Seabury Press, $15.95, 215 pp.*

primarily in constructing an alternative position. One might say that what Walter Benjamin does for the ambivalent pleasure of book-collecting, Rabuzzi does for housework. She overcomes the usually angry response to Margaret Mead's famous definition of women's work — that whatever it is, it becomes something that men don't want to do — and elicits instead the religious properties, both sacred *and demonic*, of work which is ordinarily regarded as menial, boring, and banal. The topic could be romanticized but isn't: as a professional (and a homemaker-wife-mother) Rabuzzi entertains neither praise nor scorn for housework. She assumes that it has been work performed primarily but not necessarily by women. The result is refreshingly new understanding, one that is richly informed by literary allusions.

Donald G. Bloesch's *Is the Bible Sexist? Beyond Feminism and Patriarchalism* is to be recommended for

Is the Bible Sexist? Beyond Feminism and Patriarchalism, *by Donald G. Bloesch, Crossway Books, $5.95, 139 pp.*

its attempt to overcome both of the "ideologies" designated in the subtitle. His brief taxonomies of patriarchalism, romanticism, hedonistic naturalism, and feminism are helpful in pointing up the inadequacy of all ideologies. Nevertheless, the model which Bloesch proposes in place of either patriarchalism or feminism — that of a "qualified patriarchalism" in which woman is no longer servilely subordinate to a man in marriage but is rather "freely and lovingly subordi-

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nate'' to him is not coherent nor does it seem capable of reforming the abuses of the patriarchalist view. For example, although the woman may ''be considered to have a certain superiority'' in the sense that ''her subordination among other things'' entails the role of making the male complete, she is, in Bloesch's vision of biblical faith, ''subordinate to man'' as a ''parable of the submission of the church to its Lord.'' Bloesch says that he considers the ideology of patriarchalism more dangerous than that of feminism, yet he offers only ''sexually promiscuous'' Sweden as a warning of the new kind of bondage women will suffer should the radical feminist movement attain its goals. In taking the ''biblical position'' as the norm for the marital relations of male and female, Bloesch seems curiously innocent of just how much that position, taken uncritically, is flawed by unreflective biases: that ''femininity

The Feminist Mystic and Other Essays on Women and Spirituality, *edited by Mary E. Giles, Crossroad, $8.95, 159 pp.*

is grounded in masculinity and not vice versa,'' for example. He regards this belief as a ''plain teaching of Scripture,'' but he does not provide grounds for this and other traditionalist assertions. Bloesch's view of women outside the state of marriage is more coherent. He does not exclude women from the ministry nor from leadership positions in general. His view here is founded on a clear theological reason: The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers opened the door to the ministry of women. This book is filled with scriptural references which have been used to support different ideologies: it can be seen as a well-intentioned attempt to employ them more appropriately. Bloesch is married and is a professor of theology at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary.

The Feminist Mystic and Other Essays on Women and Spirituality, edited by Mary E. Giles, confronts the problem of retrieving, reevaluating, and reconceiving the understanding of the mystical experience of women. Giles's first essay studies Catherine of Siena's and Teresa of Avila's unlikely development, given their lack of education and the restricted role of women in public life in their time, as leaders and writers. Giles's second essay, ''Take Back the Night,'' ingeniously translates the feminist call to make it safe for women to go out at night into a summons for women to ''reclaim'' their own spiritual heritage. The particular heritage she wishes to reclaim is the ''dark night of the soul'' through which men and women have traditionally been ''il-

Jung and Christianity: The Challenge of Reconciliation, *by Wallace B. Clift, Crossroad, $12.95, 169 pp.*

lumined and transformed in divine loving.'' Giles explicates the ways in which this image is particularly apt for describing the spiritual life of contemporary women. Other essays by Meinrad Craighead, Margaret Miles, Wendy Wright, Dorothy Donnelly carry on the inquiry in more individual terms. The book is both critical and appreciative, and reformist as distinct from revolutionary in its attempt to cultivate new understandings of women's mystical experiences.

Wallace B. Clift observes that his own disclaimer for the sexist language

in Jung is evidence that ''a 'corrective' is forcing itself into consciousness.'' Besides being a reliable and accessible explication of Jung's major theories in relation to his writings on religion, *Jung and Christianity: The Challenge of Reconciliation* is also a contribution toward a new understanding of Jung's explicit statements on religion, for example, his ''dogma'' of the ''dark side'' of God. Clift interprets, with particular refer-

Trusting: Theory and Practice, *by Carolyn Gratton, Crossroad, $17.50, 252 pp.*

ences to Christian theological and scriptural positions, Jung's theories in the light of his later, personal writings. He concludes that some, but only some of Jung's ideas can be ''reconciled with those of Christianity.''

The cover of *Trusting: Theory and Practice* by Carolyn Gratton may bring on vertigo—perhaps appropriately, given her phenomenological description of the initial moment of trusting as a dizzying change in perception. The book presents a careful, systematic analysis of the writings of transcripts and her interviews with five ''very average North Americans'' (two women, three men) who were part of her pilot study of the experience of trust. Although Gratton employs contemporary theorists from many fields other than psychology, her work reminds one of Abraham Maslow's *Peak-Experiences.* Both authors unabashedly reveal their early naive expectations about their subjects and the surprises they encounter in their research. Part Four of the book compares contemporary and traditional contexts, especially the Christian Scriptures on the experience of trust. Whether it is intended to be scholarly or pedagogical, this book is an important contribution to psychological and religious studies.

Aggiornamento—one small step for women—one giant leap for humankind.

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(Continued from page 597)
the reflection.

The action occurs late in the third decade of the century, on the eve of Ockham's excommunication and at the height of the debate on poverty which raged at the papal court at Avignon and throughout Europe. William of Baskerville and other theologians and prelates have recently arrived from Avignon to which they will shortly return. The abbey they visit is a microcosm of intricate, interlocking social, economic, and intellectual structures that are about to explode. Many Italian readers were astonished and amused by the similarities between Franciscan debates about true poverty and postwar debates in Italy about true Communism. Moderate mainstream Franciscans look suspiciously like certain party leaders and intellectuals. Plump curial cardinals who support drastic interpretations of poverty resemble extremist, tenured, state-paid professors who will do anything for the revolution but make it. In particular, the heretic Fra Dolcino, who goes down to defeat with his wife and band of utopian revolutionaries, invites comparison with Renato Curcio, the currently imprisoned leader of the Red Brigades.

The tale is told by Adso, a slightly obtuse German Benedictine, who plays Watson to William of Baskerville's Sherlock Holmes. Back in Germany in his old age he recounts the extraordinary events he witnessed in Italy in his youth. (In the best tradition of Cervantes and Manzoni, the original manuscript will be lost and will turn up again centuries later in a mysterious, suspect version.) He and William represent the split of faith and reason, the divergence of the *via mystica* and the *via moderna*. Baskerville, the nominalist denier of universals, the defender of God's absolute freedom and the autonomy of the state, the man of the future and Adso, a mystic, like his contemporary fellow countrymen, Suso, Tauler, and Eckhardt, the man of the past who sees God as "nothingness" and a "desert" in which he, despite William's warning, will seek obliteration.

Reasonably alert readers can not help feeling superior to Adso if only because they hold more enlightened opinions and perceive the significance of the events he narrates before he does. Behind this fictive narrator one feels frequently the mocking presence of his far more intelligent creator. This leads to certain implausible scenes, as when Adso forty years later recounts in detail his single act of love-making, to a scullery maid shortly thereafter executed as a witch. Adso's total recall of every scriptural and mystical text that passed through his sexually aroused adolescent's mind strains credibility. Throughout the book the author's patronizing of his narrator made this reader uneasy.

A certain didactic heavy-handedness and complacency is also evident, but particularly in the first hundred pages. Surely only an infinitesimal part of the book's readers can read the numerous

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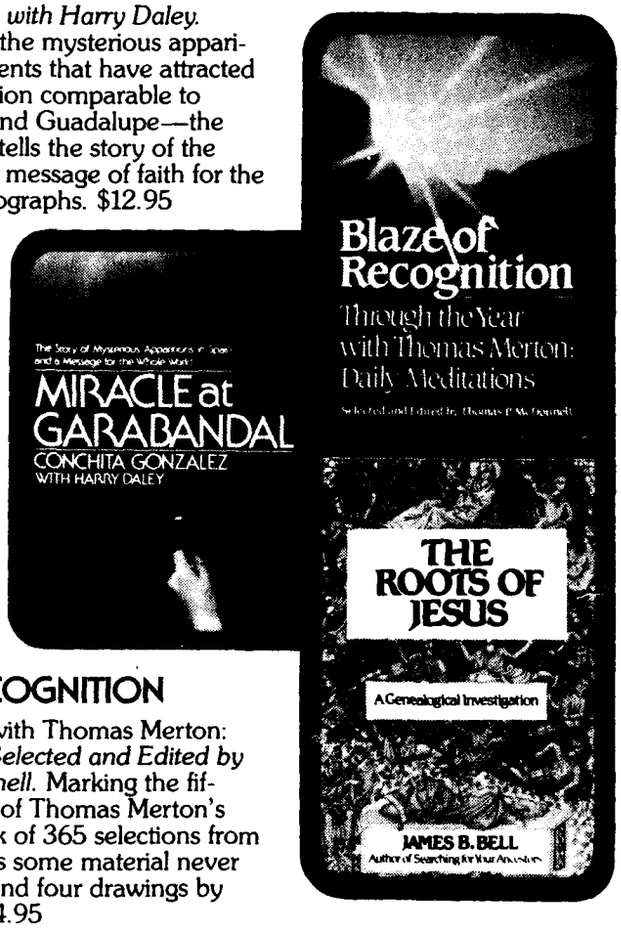

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untranslated passages in Latin. This ancient, elitist device establishes the author's scholarly credentials, but interferes with his readers' understanding of the text. One is reluctant to quibble over the library's extraordinary size and labyrinthine structure because they play so important and satisfying a part in the tale, but they too strain credibility. The librarian, a consummately literate, blind elderly Spanish monk named Jorge, whose resemblance to Jorge Borges could not be sharper, is the novel's least convincing character. His attempts to suppress a recently discovered Aristotelian treatise on laughter precipitate most of the action. It is hard to understand why the great synthesis should depend upon and be destroyed by such dour, anti-intellectual, and apocalyptic humorlessness. It is still harder to see any genuine basis of analogy between Eco's Jorge and Jorge Borges, other than superficial ones. The gratuitous violence with which Eco portrays this repellent character leads one to speculate on the possible, extra-literary causes of such hostility.

One hopes that the popular success of this engrossing, playful, serious, multi-layered book will inspire far-sighted publishers to make available in English other parts of Eco's enormous body of work.

Disturbances in the field (cont.)

(Continued from page 590)

succeed, he argued, it must first and last impress us by its "air of reality."

Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *Disturbances in the Field* is just such a novel as Henry James would have approved, being not so much a story, moral or otherwise, as the execution of an entire, unique world out of a generous accumulation of detail, character, and incident. In its size and its freedom, it achieves the "immense and exquisite correspondence with life" that James maintained was the stuff and soul of fiction. It has the total quality of reality, in all its untidiness and muddlement and mulish resistance to logic and formula. It is a novel in which an intensely rich and complex scene radiates out from the hub of its subjective center.

It begins, like the *Portrait*, from the premise that ordinariness is far more interesting than the exotic. Lydia Rowe introduces herself on the first page like this: "I was nearly forty-two and still seeking to understand." Presumptuous indeed, Lydia is not content merely to live — she wants to understand as well, and it is ultimately as a seeker of wisdom that she constitutes herself as a worthy Subject.

At forty-two, Lydia has it all, that is to say, everything the average middle-class American girl aspires to: a devoted husband, a rising career as a chamber musician, four beautiful children, and a close-knit group of loving friends. Her best friends — Nina, Gaby, and the formidable Esther — date from her Barnard years, where they first tasted the fruit of knowledge together in a philosophy survey course.

Philosophy 101, which provides a kind of leitmotif for the book is heavy on the Greeks, from Thales to Aristotle. The second, less cosmically poetic semester disappoints the girls, who, even after reconstituting themselves years later as The Philosophy Study Group, remain dismayed by the rigors of Abelard and William James and as distressed by Lydia's sometime predilection for the pessimism of Schopenhauer as by Esther's inexplicable turn first for guruism, then for Ecclesiastes.

Schwartz traces the respective fates of the four friends from their undergraduate aspirations through the vicissitudes of young adulthood, as they marry, or don't, or survive divorce, take up careers or drop them, quarrel or make peace with aging parents, have or don't have children more by accident than by choice. Four well-delineated and familiar representatives of the restless sixties and confused seventies, they are distinguished primarily by their talk (for this is a novel full of good talk) and their collective inquiry into what any of this—career, marriage, maternity—has to do with philosophy.

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sensibility of Ann Beattie's emotional drifters, but they share the winter of her discontent. Lydia's erstwhile lover and friend George, a skirt-chasing shrink, proposes a cool, dispassionate theory, derived from physics, to account for their eternal dissatisfaction. Briefly, George explains that no sooner is one need of the organism satisfied than another, more urgent one arises to replace it. This endless succession of needs and desires creates "disturbances" in the "field" of their lives, ergo, happiness, or even stasis, is impossible.

At the same time, if none of them is entirely content with her lot, their lives proceed out of their respective "essences," and The Philosophy Study Group sustains them, particularly by its Aristotelian article of faith that "a friend is another self." It's what they have, we expect them to say, instead. And up to a point, the novel functions partly as a Socratic disquisition, in that the characters within their dialogues can answer as well as ask questions about knowledge and ethics.

But then Schwartz tos[illegible]er heroine the ultimate question — the hard one by which Ivan Karamazov's cynicism prevails over his brother Alyosha's faith. In a freak accident, Lydia's two youngest, and most beloved, children are killed.

When Ivan presents his question — Why do the innocent suffer? Why do children die? — it is a splendid, fiery, awesome moment in fiction, such terrifying high tragedy that we end with a certain satisfied pride in our own intellect and humanity. Dostoevsky lets us off the philosophical hook by allowing man to accuse God. By indicting Him for His cruelty, we subsume His mercy and obtain our own freedom.

By contrast, Schwartz underplays the situation, and brutally so. Already off-center in a chaotic, unsatisfactory world, Lydia now withdraws from feeling, becomes a frigid observer of the events around her. She cannot respond to her own tragedy, except by spraining an ankle, so she can relish the small physical pain that substitutes for the other one. She indicts her friends, accusing them of abandoning her in her hour of need. She loses her husband along with her will to live, and finally regains both by clinging tenaciously to the ancient, somewhat ragged shards of Philosophy 101. By the time we leave her, everything, and nothing, has happened to the presumptuous girl who sought the truth in philosophy and found her destiny in the lives, and deaths, of other people. If she has learned anything, it is only that no one has permission to go under, and seeking is its own business.

The triumph, if we want one, belongs not to her heroine but to the novelist herself, who transforms the life of her character and her bootless search for truth into the truth of that search. "In the absence of a belief in God," according to Wallace Stevens, "the mind turns to its own creations and examines them, not alone from the aesthetic point of view, but for what they reveal, for what they validate and invalidate, for the support they give."

It is precisely in all the "ado" of *Dis-*

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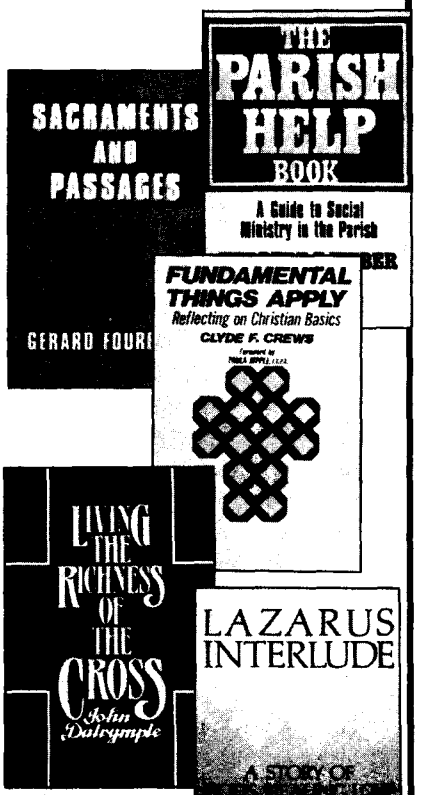

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turbances in the Field—the swirl of events surrounding this one passionate, vital, intelligent but altogether ordinary individual and her insistence, to paraphrase James again, on mattering—that the novel finds its justification. If the novel cannot explain reality, it can nonetheless embody its frustrations and limitations. This is the beautiful neo-Platonic lie of fiction: like Lydia Rowe, we understand our lives only dimly and we despair, but through her, we know our condition.

REVIEWERS

CAROLE COOK, *a free-lance writer and critic, is a former editor of* Kirkus *and* Fiction. *Her reviews have appeared in* Publishers Weekly *and* Saturday Review.

UNA CHAUDHURI *teaches English and Dramatic Literature at New York University.*

FATHER ROBERT IMBELLI *is a professor of systematic theology at Maryknoll School of Theology.*

KEVIN M. DOYLE, *a recent graduate of University of Virginia Law School and a public defender in the Bronx, interned at* Commonweal *while an undergraduate at Fordham University.*

MICHAEL GALLAGHER, *a film critic for the National Catholic News Service, was nominated for a National Catholic Book Award for his translation of Yukio Mishima's* Spring Snow.

MICHAEL ZEIK *teaches in the department of history of Marymount College in Tarrytown, New York.*

JOHN AHERN, *chairman of the Italian department and associate professor of Italian on the Dante Antolini Chair of Italian Literature at Vassar College, has written on Dante, Petrarch and Calvino for the* American Poetry Review, Parnassus, PMLA, *and other journals.*

JAMAKE HIGHWATER, *of Blackfeet-Cherokee heritage, is the author of* The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America, *and a forthcoming novel based on the life of the Sioux Indian physician, Charles Eastman. He recently hosted a series for PBS on Native Americans.*

DAVID TOOLAN, S.J., *is assistant editor of* Commonweal.

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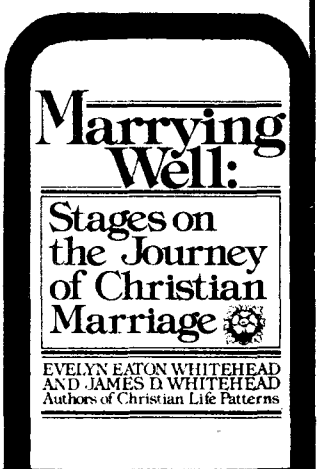
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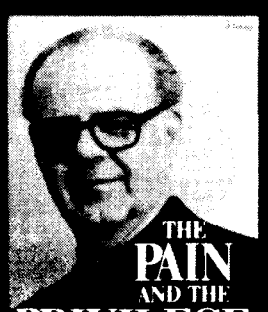

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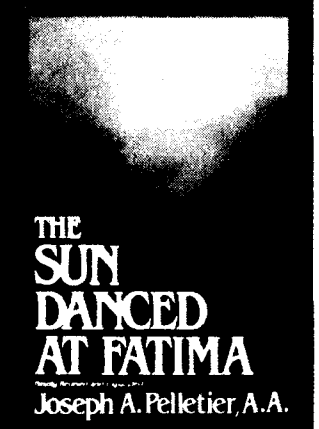

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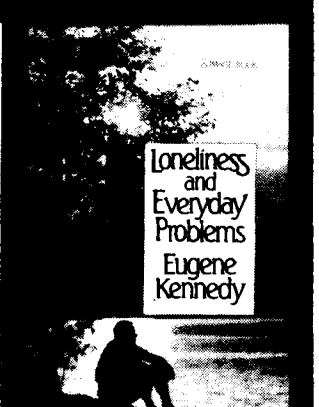

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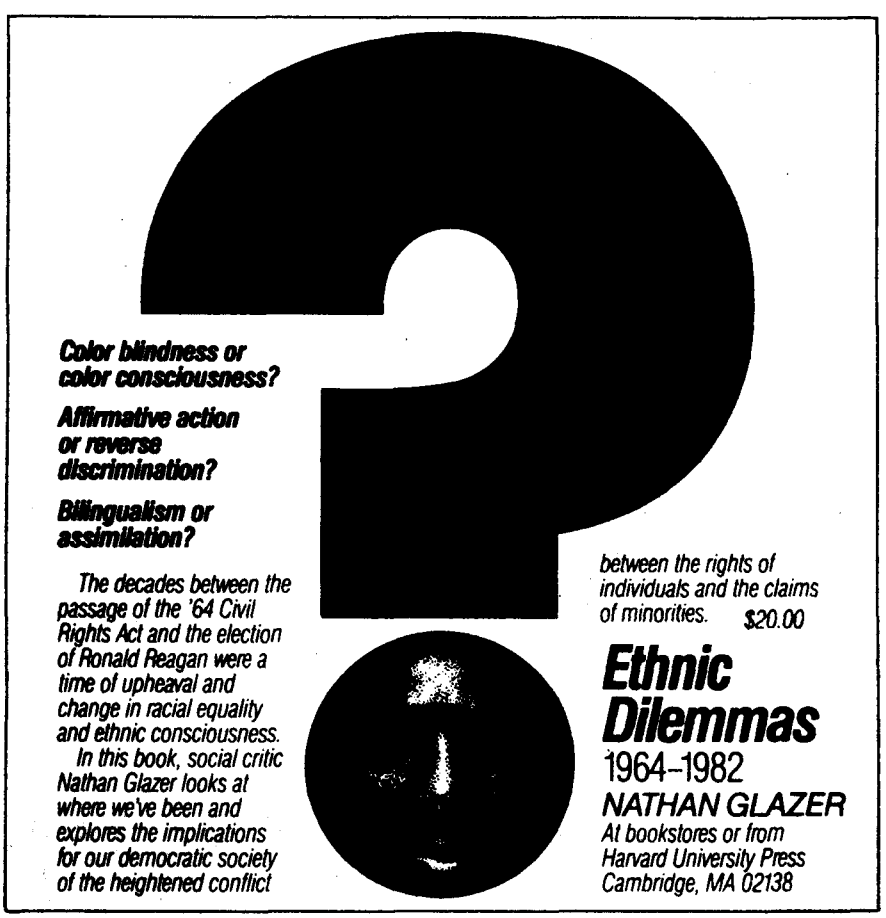
WITH the growing popular interest in the societies and philosophies, arts and sciences of the Middle Ages, this definitive survey, in dictionary form, of medieval life in Western Europe, Islam, Byzantium, and the Slavic world from A.D. 500 to 1500 is indispensable. When the series is completed—about two volumes are being published each year commencing with 1982—the twelve alphabetically arranged books will contain over 5,000 articles, commissioned and written by distinguished medievalists. The description of the series as a dictionary should not be taken too literally; although some entries are fifty-word definitions, the majority of the articles are very substantial, some providing 10,000-word explorations into various medieval subject matters.

As researchers are aware, the field of medieval studies has been highly fragmented. *The Dictionary of the Middle Ages* intends to organize a vast amount of information into a coherent whole for the first time in English. The combining of works by over one thousand scholars promises to provide a definitive reference source, containing numerous illustrations, charts, and maps. (The completed series promises over one thousand illustrations.) One of the major advantages of this compendium of medieval studies is the availability for the first time in English of many essential documents and studies. The contributing scholars represent the widest possible range of authorities in the English-speaking world: C. E. Bosworth of the University of Manchester, Angus F. Cameron of the University of Toronto, Michael Curschmann of Princeton University, Peter F. Dembowski of the University of Chicago, Fred M. Donner of Yale University, H. R. Loyn of the University of London, Helmut Nickel of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and many other notable contributors from the field of medieval studies.

The value of *The Dictionary of the Middle Ages* as a research tool is enormous. Each article ends with a selective bibliography, pointing the reader to additional readings, on a definitive subject-by-subject basis. The final (13th) volume will consist of a comprehensive index, which will be exceptionally valuable in terms of cross-reference searches. On the whole the writing is clear and engaging, if not always rapt with literary merit. My personal use of the two volumes of the *Dictionary* currently available has resulted in little frustration: I have been able to find very nearly all the subjects for which I searched (and, obviously, the index will eventually facilitate research enormously).

The range of in-depth studies is impressive: art, architecture, music, philosophy, law, theology, social structure, education, economics, politics, language, literature, religion, science, and mathematics were among the subjects the Board of Editors promised to be thoroughly covered, and my use of the *Dictionary* verified their claims. Additionally, there are articles on kings, popes, crusaders, caliphs, and philosophers, and the *Dictionary* also provides studies on Dante, Chaucer, Petrarch, Aquinas, and Augustine—giving extensive information on key figures and movements of the Middle Ages.

The Dictionary of the Middle Ages makes it clear that the medieval period was not the dark ages of popular mythology but the great bridge between the classical world and our own epoch. The breadth and detail of the articles provide a rich intellectual picture of the thousand-year period of A.D. 500 to 1500, giving us a profound sense of the origins of modern European and American cultures.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Confederacy of poets & anthropologists

SYMPOSIUM OF THE WHOLE
A RANGE OF DISCOURSE TOWARD AN ETHNOPOETICS

Edited with commentaries by Jerome & Diane Rothenberg
California, $25, 503 pp.

David Toolan

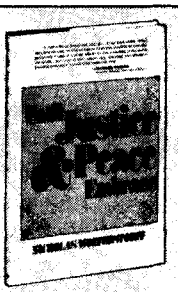
THERE are few ventures better designed to restock a faltering imagination and rearrange the mind's furniture than a new intellectual field that crosses disciplinary boundaries. I am therefore grateful to poet Jerome Rothenberg for having invented this one by coining the term "ethnopoetics" (the poetics of "the others") in the late 1960s. We are dealing here, then, with the cave of dreams, the brewing places of language (and thus self-consciousness), which shaped the cultural forms of "foreigners" such as Australian aborigines, Eskimo, Hopi Indians, the Zulu, and the Balinese among so many others—and what contemporary ethnologists and poets would make of them against the backdrop of the West's drift toward a monoculture. A monoculture which can only mean a terrible impoverishment of human horizons.

Anthologies do not usually qualify for inclusion in *Commonweal*'s book space, but gratitude for this one compels exception. The Rothenbergs have put together a selection of studies, essays, proposals, and polemics—Vico, Herder, and Blake juxtaposed with Marx, Rimbaud, Lévi-Straus, and Charles Olson, Léopold Senghor, Mircea Eliade together with Antonin Artaud and Benjamin Lee Whorf among others—that ought to signal chaos; instead the friction generates intellectual sparks, a current of electricity. In many ways, this anthology is a sign of the resurgence of what could be Romanticism-come-of-age. Among other services, such a Romanticism would insist, as do many of the contributors here, that preserving the vast pool of the world's cultural diversity is no less imperative for us than saving endangered biological species. In neither case do we as yet know what use such prolific riches will have; what we do know well enough is that our current short-term pragmatism has the idiot cunning of Cyclops.

But ethnopoetics is not just proposing fun for romanticists or antiquarians. Its focus is really on the genre of performance—and that means ritual—and what that can reveal or make visible about what is actually going on beneath and behind our social and political dramas. As Victor Turner puts it,

> The mere fact that Westerners are now becoming aware of the potency of other traditions of thought and expressive culture is itself an act of "making visible" and at the same time an entering into reflexive relations with peoples, genders, classes; ethnicities, the sick, the marginal and the troubled, all of whom from beyond the pale or beneath our bureaucratic rationality insist that we are them. Their presence and their cultural product are "meta-commentaries" on our own lifeways—in which we are

For the Concerned Reader...



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becoming increasingly disappointed as their lack of grace or blessing becomes more obvious.

How does one gain reflective distance from one's own culture, be in it but not of it? Well, one answer is through the perspective that comes through dwelling on the poetic forms, the myths, and rites of other cultures. In the current scene, moreover, such a cross-cultural perspective would seem essential to the kind of post-modern contemplative attitude we must have.

But there is more. Carnival, festival, sport, and theater represent the foci of a new generation of anthropologists who have thereby shifted attention from concepts such as structures, equilibrium, system, and regularity to concepts like process, indeterminacy, reflexivity, resilience, and the ritual performance that lets primal cultures know what their subconscious is up to. As I have said, the special focus here lies on performance and the kind of reflective awareness performance gives access to, one involving not just the head but the whole bodily and cultural organism. This new focus has brought ethnologists into fruitful alliance with poets, dramatic artists, and (potentially) liturgists—with all those, in fact, who recognize that ancient wisdom has much to tell us about the creation of sacred space and restoring the magic of the word. What is decidedly new in this conjunction is not just that poets are beginning to recover the ritual role of bards reciting an epic before the tribal or castle hearth, but that some academic anthropologists are dropping their scientific hiding places and getting into the act. It is not unusual these days to have an anthropologist conduct you on a shamanic "vision hunt." In short, to use Rothenberg's term, some of these heady experts are becoming "technicians of the sacred." They are not just reminding us nostalgically of the sacred space and time our culture has supposedly lost, but devising ways of reanimating the wasteland.

Our culture, writes Victor Turner in an overview of ethnopoetics in these pages, stands at one of those betwixt and between times, the old frames collapsing, the new constellations nascent and taking shape in aesthetic fantasy rather than by the rule of law and ethics. The whole world, he says, can be viewed "as one vast initiatory seclusion camp." From this perspective, the East-West struggle looks like a battle between two cultural dinosaurs, each in its way blind to the birth-pangs of a new culture—whose mood is understandably subjunctive, full of "as ifs." At such a moment, poets—be they wordsmiths or scientists hypothesizing—resume their role as the "unacknowledged legislators of the race." Specifically, Turner would charge poet-performers with the task of picking up the pieces of that worldwide process through which the sacred body of tribal solidarity breaks into the competitive individual and myriad secular bodies. In the mode of ritual specialists, the possibility remains that they may reopen the secrets of another kind of membership, "in a 'risen body' of humankindness redeemed through 'mutual forgiveness of each vice' (Blake), forgiveness made possible through radical, existential reflexivity."

What, then, is this new confederacy of anthropologists and poets up to? Poet Robert Duncan calls it "a symposium of the whole." "In such a new 'totality,' all the old excluded orders must be included. The female, the proletariat, the foreign; the animal and the vegetative; the unconscious and the unknown; the criminal and the failure—all that has been outcast and vagabond must return to be admitted in the creation of what we consider we are."

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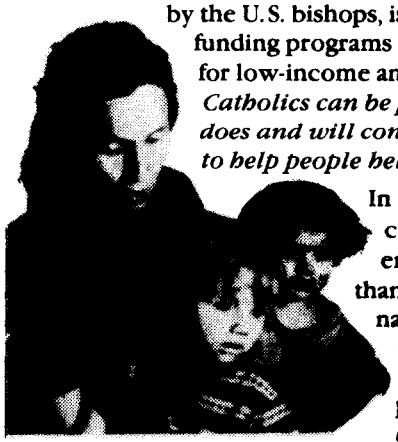

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